

LIFE-POWERED POETRY: THE NARRATION
OF PERCEPTUAL PROCESSES IN THE
EARLY POETRY OF EZRA POUND
AND WALLACE STEVENS

By

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For my wife, Patricia
and
Our son, Joshua
and
My parents, Mr. and Mrs. K. G. Nims

Your love keeps me possible.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the
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This study of Ezra Pound's and Wallace Stevens' first major collections of poetry is based upon the fact that the Twentieth century is a century of possibilities. In terms of literary evaluations, the emphasis recently has been on choosing between possible traditions. This evaluative process is the logical outcome of the wealth of historical information presently available. It also partakes of the admirable organization of concepts this century has achieved. However, simply advocating Wallace Stevens as a member of the native American tradition or Ezra Pound as a member of the expatriate American tradition tends to obscure the common concern of both poets with a more concretely traditional problem--the problem of perception.

As nature reveals more and more of its inherent power in the activities of the physical environment, this problem of perception must become central. The guiding insight of this study is that Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens are poets who both can tell the story of their attempts to establish contact with a stubbornly alive and mobile nature. They do this by turning outward from an internal system of categories and symbols that attempts to manipulate the world toward an external pattern of images that attempts to participate with the living world.

The first chapter of this study attempts to sketch the recent evolution of this problematic relationship with nature and introduces several of Pound's and Stevens' characteristic poetic methods with explications of Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" and "A Song of the Degrees" and Stevens' "The Snow Man."

The second chapter focuses on Pound, showing how he discovers in Ernest Fenollosa's vision of the Chinese ideogram a means of concretely organizing his attempts to merge his poetic rhythms with the larger rhythms of concrete natural phenomena. He does this in his Cathay translations by means of a synthesis between the audible rhythms of classical Western poetry and the visible harmonics of active process in Fenollosa's version of the ideogram.

The third chapter focuses on Stevens, showing how he moves out from a poetic perception organized around symbolic associations in "Domination of Black" to a poetic perception organized around concrete images in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" and "Six Significant Landscapes." This chapter also shows the congeniality of Stevens' poetic method in the Harmonium poems with the natural philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, demonstrating how some of that philosopher's terminology is particularly applicable in documenting Stevens' transition into a poet of images.

The fourth chapter brings Pound and Stevens together to show how they both describe the development of a new type of narrative persona that discovers himself through his participation with living reality. In Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley and Stevens' "The Comedian as the Letter C" the protagonists of the narratives, "E. P. - Mauberley" and Crispin, express their personalities as ranges of degree in intensity of contact with reality, not as observers or survivors of that reality.

INTRODUCTION

This study of the contributions of Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens to the art of modern poetry is an unusual but necessary project. It is necessary because an arbitrary distinction between the works of these two poets--a distinction basically the product of academic schematizing--stands in the way of a more concrete means of evaluating them. That is, both Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens can be evaluated in terms of their mutual contributions to a genuine tradition--the tradition of concern for physical perception as a basis for art.

Simply stated, the standard critical distinction between these two poets' creative efforts has been based upon each man's choice of working environment. Should the American poet, like Stevens, remain at home and develop his native perceptions? Or should he, like Pound, return to his cultural roots and work with the perceptions and resources available in Europe in order to confirm his American universality? As long as the debate revolves around the influence of the physical environment, it is completely legitimate and quite valuable, as a study of the lively disagreements between Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams will reveal.

When they issue from the pens of such influential literary critics as Harold Bloom, Roy Harvey Pearce, and Hugh Kenner, however, the ripostes are great deal more heavy-handed. While prefacing his book on Yeats, Harold Bloom has this to say about Pound:

Yeats, Hardy, and Wallace Stevens seem to me to be the poets writing in English in our century whose work most merits sustained comparison with the major poets of the Nineteenth century. . . . the phenomenon of high contemporary reputations dying away permanently has occurred before, and will again. Donne and Shelley vanished for generations and are then revived, but Eliot and Pound may prove to be the Cowley and Cleveland of this age and a puzzle to future historians of our sensibilities.¹

According to Bloom, Wallace Stevens is a member of the "right tradition." Pound and Eliot, however, have joined the losing side in a game where he, the critic, makes the rules. Roy Harvey Pearce, who wrote his celebration of the native American tradition of poetry, The Continuity of American Poetry, at a time when the ugly quarrel between Pound and his native country was still generating bitter aftertaste, has the following negative criticism of Pound:

The question of who betrayed whom remains an open one. Perhaps Pound's achievement is to have forced it. Perhaps he will turn out to be the Ossian of the Twentieth century. . . .
As Whitman's love for himself would drive him to transforming all other selves into aspects of himself in order that he

might love them, Pound's love for himself would drive him to destroy all other selves whose existence his idea² of love will prevent him from loving.

Pearce's criticism is more concrete than Bloom's, but the general direction of the criticism is the same. Deprived of its roots in the American poetic tradition Pearce sees being established in the Nineteenth century, Pound's poetic ambition becomes violently egotistic, in contrast to the native Whitman's benign egotism. Pound thus petulantly leaves the American poetic palm lying in the dust for the more decorous and provincial Wallace Stevens to pick up: a triumph Pearce describes in the last chapters of his book.³ Pound's critical advocates, though, have blows for the opposition as well. Hugh Kenner, writing in A Homemade World, the American Modernist Writers, turns Stevens' domestic nature to his disadvantage:

Stevens took the dissolution of Christianity in Reading, Pa., for a summons to a new humanism, a life's work. But his work illustrates more interestingly a phase in the history of poetry, to which he seems to have given little explicit attention, than in the history of philosophy and religion,⁴ concerning which he ruminates a good deal.

Interestingly enough, all of the participants in the debate cited above do have one concern in common. Both sides of the argument make a strong appeal to the judgment of history. Bloom, Pearce, and Kenner all declare that "history" will show the true weakness of

a Pound or a Stevens. The "history" these critics invoke is more of a succession of intellectual and academic abstractions than a concrete accumulation of knowledge and experience. In his excellent book, Time in Literature, Hans Meyerhoff calls this abstraction of historical process "historicism," and gives the following account of its rise in the Nineteenth century as a method of evaluation:

When historicism reached its climax in the last century, human history came to be explored and recorded on a scale and depth never attempted before. . . . The total effect of this development was to provide, on the intellectual, theoretical level, a reconstruction of the direction of time within the life of mankind (or before the origin of man) never encountered before in history. Moreover, it was an intellectual model, disclosing a coherent structure and an inherent rationality within the infinite chaos and succession of historical phenomena. History was the march of reason through the world of man from Pithecanthropus Erectus to Hegel. And it was inherently rational, not only as an object of science, but also as a moral agent. For the history of the world was also the world's court of justice.⁵

But, as the Twentieth century has come to discover, this tremendous volume of historical awareness is a double-edged knife. As long as Western men could empirically discover evidence that this "history" was indeed progressive, moving toward some ultimate and positive goal, historicism, Meyerhoff observes, could provide a substitute for the loss of

religious belief brought on by the power of the new developments in scientific method to make large-scale explanations.⁶ Unfortunately, the wars, economic upheavals, and ecological blight of this century have done little to confirm that the "march of history" is necessarily progressive. Historical success is not inevitable, even when it is predicted by the best authorities. It is rather, as Darwin revealed amidst the scandalized reactions of his contemporaries, a small and problematic part of a great mass of failure.

Despite the proven limitations of historicism, it lives on in somewhat diminished form in the writings of those whom Harold Bloom calls "historians of our sensibilities," of whom he is one. These critics recognize the problematic nature of historical success, but they believe that if we arrange cultural information into patterns, which they usually term "traditions" and "schools," then we may discern a central or dominant "tradition." This method is by no means ineffective if the cultural information is of sufficient age to reveal an unequivocally dominant pattern. However, the closer one approaches to the present, this method becomes more and more arbitrary and self-conscious. With so much access to times sufficiently old to be evaluated by this method of organizing history, it becomes tempting to speculate about what place in history

modern events will occupy. It becomes tempting to pretend that the present time is already "history" and make critical evaluations from such an abstract perspective. From this perspective, the future is not a fund of fresh possibilities. It is, rather, a projected justification for the critic's proposed "tradition." Naturally, this method requires that one affect a certain amount of omniscience. Unfortunately, though, this omniscience has to be exercised in an artificially projected "historical" environment, isolated from the contingencies of actual life.

We should note carefully that this phenomenon of creating "instant" traditions out of terminology can only occur in an atmosphere where information can be produced for its own sake and terminology can beget more terminology. Only in the modern world has it become possible to use the consistencies of verbal activity so efficiently as to isolate ourselves from the processes of the physical environment.⁷ In such a verbal environment, a "tradition" becomes simply a way of postulating a cultural pattern. "History" is no longer the knowledge necessary for survival, but a controversy of competing explanations. The historical evaluation, then, as used by Bloom, Pearce, and Kenner in the passages cited above, employs only the abstract

"history" that is a function of the modern powers of information accumulation and storage.⁸ The abstractness of this "history" is a symptom of the modern loss of decisive contact with physical reality.

There exists a more concrete tradition in terms of which we may evaluate the poetry of Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens, however; and it is a tradition in which they are conjoined rather than disjunct. This tradition is the ongoing attempt throughout Western history to understand the relationship between physical perception and symbolic language. In Plato's Phaedrus, Socrates tells a fable that summarizes the problem as the ancients saw it. In the fable, the chief Egyptian god, Thamus, addresses the god Thoth upon being presented with the latter god's invention of written language:

O most ingenious Thoth, one man has the ability to develop a new skill, but another to judge whether it be a curse or a blessing to its users. Now you, the father of letters, through your affection see in them the opposite of their true power. For this invention will cause those who use it to lose the learning in their minds by neglecting their memories; since, through this reliance on letters which are external and alien to the mind, they will lose the ability to recall things within themselves. You have invented not a medicine to strengthen memory but an inferior substitute for it.⁹

In this passage, the obvious implication of Thamus' statement is that the basis for the mind's power of

memory, the power of memory that gives humans their particularly effective ability to adapt to their environment, must be based upon physical perception rather than verbal categories. The traditional problem, simply stated, is this: how can men derive the immense benefits for social organization afforded by written symbols without a corresponding loss in the ability of the individual person to remember and appreciate his sensory link with nature?

The traditional answer to this question, of course, is by means of art. Of the arts, poetry is particularly successful at this enterprise; since poetry is made of words, it can use those words to show how the abstractions of words are grounded in living experience. This need for the grounding of verbal categories is remembered by Aristotle, for instance, in the first pages of his

Metaphysics:

All men naturally have an impulse to get knowledge. A sign of this is the way we prize our senses; for even apart from their utility, they are prized on their own account, especially sensing with the eyes. . . .

From memory men can get experience; for by often remembering the same thing they acquire the power of unified experience . . . Art is born when out of the many bits of information derived from experience there emerges a grasp of those similarities in view of which they are a unified whole.¹⁰

For Aristotle, art expresses a physical wholeness that is the basis for categorical distinctions. As long as this

reverence for perception as the ground of knowledge remained in force, art as a document of unified perception could be considered the most profound of teaching vehicles. As late as the Sixteenth century, Sir Philip Sidney could confidently claim in his "Apology for Poetry" that the poet could combine the teaching roles of philosopher and historian:

Now doth the peerless poet perform
both: for whatsoever the philosopher
saith should be done, he giveth a perfect
picture of it in someone by whom he presup-
poseth it was done; so he coupleth the
general notion with the particular example.
A perfect picture, I say, for he yieldeth
to the powers of mind an image of that
whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a
wordish description: which doth neither
strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the
soul so much as that other doth.¹¹

For Sidney, the mind's powers of organization and perception are still in vital contact with one another. The poet "yieldeth to the powers of mind an image" and can "possess the sight of the soul."

In the Seventeenth century, however, the development of modern scientific thought, propelled by the work of Galileo, Descartes, and Newton, created a conception of perception, particularly of motion, that greatly changed the character and importance of concrete individual perception. In his article, "Galileo and the Scientific Revolution," Alexandre Koyre brings out the assumptions

that governed the new conception of matter and its movement:

Thus, in order to appear evident, the principle of inertial motion presupposes (a) the possibility of isolating a given body from all its physical environment, (b) the conception of space which identifies it with the homogenous, infinite space of Euclidean geometry, and (c) a conception of movement--and of rest--which considers them as states and places them on the same ontological level of being.¹²

The effect of these new assumptions has been, of course, enormous. This viewing of the bodies of the physical world as states rather than processes has given Western man the power to radically alter his environment and enhance the quality and complexity of the human experience. On the negative side, though, the Newtonian outlook has tended to diminish the quality and complexity originally inherent in man's physical environment. According to the Newtonian view, the universe consists mostly of non-living particles of matter distributed through space. This matter depends upon external force rather than inherent design for its organization and activity. Knowledge is thus grounded in abstract laws of cause and effect rather than in concrete perception. The human powers of understanding move out of participation with nature and station themselves in the detached observation of nature. This outlook tends to deprive art of its powers to physically stimulate the

memory and concretely unify knowledge because perception is relegated to the passive role of receiving disparate sense impressions. It had taken several thousand years, but the fears of the ancients were now realized: purely abstract concepts and terminology developed unimpeded. The determinate link between intellect and sense was broken and men could start forgetting their physical contact with the environment.

Hence, when the dominant literary figure of the latter part of the Eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson, stated that the foundation of art was a "general nature"¹³ that included both the human mind and its physical environment, he was working against, not with, the most powerful philosophical influences of his day. For both David Hume and Bishop Berkeley who, following Locke, were systematically developing the philosophical implications of Newton's cosmology, there was no inherent unity in the physical environment for art to draw upon. For Berkeley, physical nature was mere appearance that could be unified only in the mind of God. For Hume, physical nature was a welter of disparate sense impressions subject only to the precise discriminations of taste. Johnson was defending more than just "common sense" when he kicked the stone after one of Berkeley's sermons; he was defending the sense of the physical basic to art as well.¹⁴

This subversive concern with perception continued into the Nineteenth century with the work of the Romantics. Coleridge, in particular, felt he had to face Hume's and Berkeley's criticisms of the power of perception to garner unity from physical nature. Following Kant, Coleridge gave the name "imagination" to the process by which nature as sensory reality infuses the categories of the mind with form. The highest expression of this creative process is what Coleridge called the Primary Imagination, or the "eternal I AM."¹⁵ Coleridge was able to convincingly assert that nature was an external force capable of having a strong effect upon human conceptions, even though he did not succeed in systematically refuting Hume's skepticism. Coleridge's formulation has had two major implications for the role of perception in poetry. First of all, by his successful assertion of the external force of nature, he assured that future poets would have to deal with perception no matter what the prevailing philosophical or scientific views. Secondly, he realized that the problem of perception in art is integral to an artistic perception of human identity.

During the course of the Nineteenth century, though, the conception of nature as powerful external force gave it the power to exert widely varying effects upon literary efforts. For some writers, particularly the American

Transcendentalists, physical nature could exemplify an ideal order, a pure alternative to human desires and aspirations disorganized by the upheaval of the Industrial Revolution. On the other hand, physical nature could also be seen as essentially alien to man and implacably opposed to his concerns. This more problematic sense of nature, no matter how it was subjectively interpreted, now had an inherent power. Nature could now take on a "character" that matched the author's disposition toward the physical environment. Nature became less of a concept and more of a physical presence. As such a presence, nature manifested itself more as a living thing than as a stage set.¹⁶

By the end of the Nineteenth century, important artistic movements such as realism, impressionism, and naturalism all expressed the need of the artist to respect the reality that he perceived rather than to sift his perception through human laws or intellectual assumptions. This attitude toward physical nature allowed it an autonomy that made a fresh interaction between man and his environment seem quite possible. At the turn into the Twentieth century, both literary and visual artists began to demonstrate to Western man that wholeness need not exist purely within man or within nature, but in an interactive process between them.

It was this awareness of interactive processes that electrified the world during the early poetic careers of Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens. They both began their poetic efforts at a crucial juncture in the history of Western artistic and scientific perception. Just as the Newtonian hypothesis was showing its greatest material success in terms of invention and industry, the powers of perception made a startling comeback in the relativity physics of Albert Einstein. Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity verified the intuition of artists who had been following their perceptual inclinations during the Nineteenth century. Einstein built his physics around the speed of light as a constant of change. Thus, the change inherent to physical perception was no longer a deficiency, but its greatest asset. Perception was now a matter of participation rather than observation.

For Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens, this new perceptual environment was an impetus for their artistic development. One of the chief concerns for both of them as poets was the fact that this new emphasis on sensory perception tended to undermine the power of words to enforce pattern upon sensory experience. The verbal symbol no longer had an assumed equality to a given perception. In the Newtonian world, there could be a distinction between terminology that described the immediate environment, the concrete

term, and terminology that described more enduring states of being, the abstract term. Both Pound and Stevens realized, though, that in a world of perceptual primacy, all verbal symbols are to some degree abstract. This fundamental abstraction of language posed a poetic problem for both of them.

In the creative work of Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens, then, the traditional problem of the relationship between language and perception comes to the fore again as a central poetic concern. Each of these two poets attempts to find a method of re-harmonizing the verbal world with the perceptual world. To do this, both poets attempt to view language as a process, focusing not so much upon the individual symbols, but on the way in which those symbols are connected with each other. Thus Pound and Stevens do not compose their poems by stringing together isolated words, they compose their poems syntactically. They compose with units of change rather than units of stasis. Pound and Stevens both attempt to make the change that occurs within a poem harmonize with a change that occurs in concrete perception. Each change that they bring into action verifies the existence of a process that is a clue to a larger whole of process, an "image" of that larger process.

This systematic emphasis upon change in the poetry of Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens is ultimately an emphasis upon living process. Life is the primal act of creative change that their poems feed upon. No matter what the ostensible subject matter of a particular poem, the creative effort is energized by images from the living system of change that characterizes the concrete reality of the Twentieth century. Pound and Stevens are poets who reach out to the physical world to confirm a value for perception that is both new and old, that is not dependent upon an intellectually posited pattern for culture but upon the rhythms and images of living reality. "To have gathered from the air a live tradition/ or from a fine old eye the unconquered flame/ This is not vanity."¹⁷

NOTES

¹Harold Bloom, Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. v.

²Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 100-101.

³Pearce, pp. 376-434.

⁴Hugh Kenner, A Homemade World, the American Modernist Writers (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), p. 72.

⁵Hans Meyerhoff, Time in Literature (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1955), p. 97.

⁶See Meyerhoff, pp. 100-103.

⁷Alfred North Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (New York: The Free Press, 1967), pp. 50-59. This is Whitehead's well-known discussion of what he calls "The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness." His remarks are basic to my analysis in the text.

⁸See Meyerhoff, p. 103.

⁹Plato, Phaedrus, trans. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg in The Nature of Narrative by Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 19.

¹⁰Aristotle, Metaphysics, trans. Richard Hope (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1960), pp. 3-4.

¹¹Sir Philip Sidney, "An Apology for Poetry," in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), pp. 160-161.

¹²Alexandre Koyre, "Galileo and the Scientific Revolution," Philosophical Review, 52(1943), 377.

¹³Samuel Johnson, "Prefaces to Shakespeare," in Rasselas, Poems, and Selected Prose, ed. Bertrand Bronson, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 263.

¹⁴See F. S. C. Northrop, The Meeting of East and West (New York: Macmillan, 1960), pp. 84-115, for a good summation of the development of English thought from Newton and Locke through Hume. Northrop is particularly conscientious about bringing out the practical consequences of this line of thought.

¹⁵Samuel T. Coleridge, "From Chapter XIII of Biographia Literaria," in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971) pp. 470-471.

¹⁶The greatest account of this rising physical reality is Herman Melville's Moby Dick.

¹⁷Ezra Pound, The Cantos of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 577.

CHAPTER ONE

EZRA POUND, WALLACE STEVENS AND

THE PROBLEM OF PERCEPTION

Writing to his son, recently enrolled at Harvard in 1897, Wallace Stevens' father had these words of encouragement for a decent young man with poetic aspirations:

You will see about Cambridge some nook perhaps seen by the eyes of those to whose greatness the world yielded niggardly homage then and who moved on to describe some other cloister in the words that never die. And who knows but bringing to its description your power of painting pictures in words (emphasis added) you make it famous--and some Yankee old maid will say--it was here that Stevens stood and saw the road to distinction.¹

Stevens' father's evaluation of his son's talents is both accurate and prophetic. But, as a perusal of Stevens' early journals and letters will show, his father made his observation from a great mass of evidence. Long before he was a mature poet, Stevens was a young man vividly interested in perception; and this love of perception is the vital fuel that drives his life-long poetic work.

Ezra Pound's early correspondence from London some ten years later, addressed to his college friend

William Carlos Williams, shows that Pound's poetic credo, even though it was developing under much different circumstances from Stevens', was taking a similar direction:

I wish, no fooling, that you would define your ultimate attainments of poesy. Of course we won't agree. That would be too uninteresting. I don't know that I can make much of a list.

1. To paint the thing as I see it.
2. Beauty
3. Freedom from didacticism
4. It is only good manners if you repeat a few other men to at least do it better or more briefly.²

The item that Pound places at the top of his list is also prophetic of a life-long attempt to make contact with his perceptions. No matter what their differences in material circumstance or intellectual inclination, from the beginning of their poetic careers, both Pound and Stevens demonstrate a systematic awareness of the ancient problem of relating language and perception.

I

After several years in London and numerous contacts with other potential poetical innovators, Ezra Pound's interest in the relationship of poetry to perception found well-publicized expression in his Imagist program. The central tenets of the movement are straightforward enough:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.³

The strongest implication of Imagist theory is the assertion of the primacy of perception. Perception does not exist for the benefit of poetry; poetry exists for the benefit of perception. Artificiality or affectation stands in the way of the poetic act of seeing. The imagist method, when used successfully, can reveal the potential for movement in an image quite clearly, as an analysis of Pound's most well-known Imagist poem, "In a Station of the Metro," will show:

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.⁴

It is immediately obvious that the perceiver is not the subject of this poem: there is no "I see." Therefore, whatever movement the poem demonstrates cannot be ordered according to any system outside the perception itself. Yet, despite this limitation, there is a real movement within the poem. This movement takes form in the transition from the abstractness and vagueness of "apparition" to the concreteness and solidity of "bough." That is, there is a perceptual process that definitely occurs between the

image of seemingly disembodied faces in the steam and smoke of a railway station and the image of the petals on a bough. "Apparition" captures the initial vagueness of the perception in a properly lively and emotionally connotative way, avoiding the blandness and philosophical implication of its close relative "appearance." "Bough" effectively solidifies the vagueness of the initial "apparition" and expresses the cleared vision in terms of a concrete and sensible manifestation that still maintains a number of radiant extensions from its main body. We should note, though, that the poem does not relate its nominal components by the standard comparative means of metaphor or simile. To do so using a form of the verb "to be" would indicate that "apparition," "faces in the crowd," "petals," and "bough" occur simultaneously as facts in the perception, when they actually do not. Instead, the poem is revealing the process by which a single perception can form out of its constituent elements. Rather than establish a metaphor, the poem attempts to establish a tension between extremes of possibility in a whole situation--the vagueness of the apparition and the concreteness of the bough mentioned above. By evoking the tension between these two experiential extremes, the poem demonstrates the temporal process inherent in the scene that it documents. The vagueness of the opening

"apparition" exists as an indeterminately extended perceptual field which is then discriminated into particulars which finally coalesce into the concreteness of the "bough." The two extremes of "apparition" and "bough," then, are boundaries of a perceptual process rather than definitions. The action of the poem is the action of an image revealing itself in both its spatial and temporal dimensions.

Pound is quite critically precise in rendering this activity of the image when he defines the image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."⁵ A "complex," as Pound uses it, is a whole that clearly reveals the multiple relations of its parts. Such a "complex" cannot be an homogenous and independent object located by chronological time. Instead, it must be the emergent product of a relational process. In such an emerging image, time is an internal constituent rather than an external measure. That is to say, one of the essential features of an image is that it "takes time." It "takes time" in order for its pattern to take form. The time necessary may be only "an instant," but that initial instant is extended insofar as the possible relationships in the complex reveal themselves individually. The image thus occurs at the focus of a web of action. As Pound develops it, the image in many ways resembles

a living cell. It can be part of a larger process, but it is itself a process; and a good imagist poem can narrate this process taking form. Pound's imagist poems are compact and distinctive, to be sure, but by appreciating their living energy we can better understand the intensity of Pound's concern with perception. In the imagist exercises, Pound is able to hone the technique of perception that makes it possible to keep his more ambitious works concrete.

The importance of intensity, activity, and concreteness for Pound's poetic perceptions cannot be overemphasized. Pound is determined that poetry engage the senses. Herbert Schneidau has aptly pointed out the significance of the verb in the statement that "an Image is that which presents (emphasis added) an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Schneidau believes that what Pound asks for in the statement is not just description: "Once again the idea of visualization can be misleading: it was not 'pictures in verse' that Pound wanted, but something with the hard-edged quality, the sharp definition, that the visual sense furnishes."⁶ Pound believes that the poem should "present" something that can be felt. For Pound, the poem must participate in the sensory world. He insists that poetic style be a means of contacting the world rather than a means of self-conscious decoration.

Few activities are more useless for him than the poetic confection of mundane ideas that could be more directly stated in prose. In good prose, in fact, Pound finds a great deal of value that he feels poets could do well to emulate. "Poetry," he says, in a phrase borrowed from Ford Madox Ford, "should be at least as well written as prose."⁷ Thus Pound does not hesitate to acknowledge the benefits for poetry as well as prose in the clarity of writing produced by the French novelists Flaubert and Stendahl. These men had the ability to narrate processes by means of significant detail, what Flaubert called le mot juste. This emphasis on precision rather than stylistic convention is an innovation that Pound feels has the power to liberate poetry from fastidiousness and allow it to return to direct perception of living action. The correct word is the correct word whether or not it stretches the pentameter or gives a socially indecorous image. Pound is quite uncompromising about this notion of detailed interaction of writing style and concrete experience; and he does not hesitate to take major literary figures to task for what he feels are their failures in this respect:

. . . We are tired of men upon perches.
 Virgil is a man upon a perch. All
 these writers of pseudo-epopee are people
 on perches. Homer and the author of the
Poema del Cid are keen on their stories.

Milton and Virgil are concerned with decoration and trappings, and they muck about with a moral. Dante is concerned with a senso morale, which is a totally different matter. He breeds discontentments. Milton does not breed discontentments, he only sets the neophyte trying to pile up noise and adjectives . . .⁸

Pound believes that only the poems that participate in the processes of life are what he calls poems of "the first intensity."⁹ Poetry of the "second intensity," on the other hand, tends to attempt to operate as a common denominator. Such poetry tries to reclaim the potentially fresh aesthetic experience for civilized society by means of standardized tropes. In Pound's eyes, successful poetry revels in the immediacy of the poet's contact with the world, unafraid of the "discontentments" that often accompany this intense interaction of the perceiving poet with the concrete environment. Such poetry may or may not be socially acceptable. Very often it is not. But this is a chance that Pound is perfectly willing to take; for interaction, change, and motion lie near the heart of his poetic vision. Uprooting and discontentments are a part of life; and so they are a part of Pound's poetry as well.

No matter how much action and change poetry may attempt to narrate, the poet's raw materials are still words. Verbal abstractions tend to stabilize the general

form of an action. Yet insofar as they emphasize this stability, they are likely to build patterns upon patterns and lose their essential contact with the particular processes they symbolize. Poets who "muck about with a moral" reinforce this alienation of the verbal symbol from the energy that it is dependent upon.¹⁰ This problem is an unavoidable one for anyone who wishes to use an abstract Western language to express a vision of perceptual immediacy. The first group of writers to attempt to consciously face the problem of how to deal with the inherent distance of language from sensory reality were the French Symbolists of the Nineteenth century. Therefore, Ezra Pound, like a number of other young writers seeking fame and fortune in turn-of-the-century London, certainly must have been influenced by the first theoretical study of symbolism to appear in England, Arthur Symons' The Symbolist Movement in Literature, first published in 1899. Although Symons' approach is primarily impressionistic, he occasionally cuts to the heart of his matter, as in the following statement about Paul Verlaine:

French poetry, before Verlaine, was an admirable vehicle for a really fine, a really poetical, kind of rhetoric . . . But with Victor Hugo, with Baudelaire, we are still under the dominion of rhetoric. "Take eloquence, and wring its neck!" said Verlaine in his Ars Poetique; and he showed, by writing it, that French verse could be written without rhetoric . . . "L'art, mes

enfants, c'est d'etre absolument soi-meme."
he tells us in one of his later poems . . .

For, consider the natural qualities
which this man had for the creation of a
new poetry . . . Take, then, his suscept-
ibility of his senses, an emotional suscept-
ibility not less delicate, a life sufficiently
troubled to draw out every motion of which
he was capable, and with it, that absorption
in the moment, that inability to look before
or after.¹¹

Such a strong statement concerning a necessary and poten-
tially dangerous sincerity for the artist that must
override all other considerations must have struck a
responsive chord in a young poet determined that poetry
should directly challenge all laxness of mind and
comfortable assumption. The symbolists discovered that
the aggressively creative poet could isolate a series of
associations between words that were capable of breaking
out of familiar verbal patterns without becoming entirely
unintelligible. Such poetry recognizes the power of
language to enforce a kind of order upon experience; yet,
it also recognizes that this order need not be born of
standard rhetorical patterns. In its emphasis upon the
unfamiliar patterns of expression, symbolism could attempt
to recapture a respect for the subtlety and complexity of
perceptual contact with the physical environment. One of
the effects accruing from this fresh focus upon the
complexity of contact between the sense and the environment
is the demonstration of the emotional nature of this contact.

When poetic experience is civilized and standardized, it is more likely to produce scholarly research than emotional excitement. However, when poetic experience loses some of its predictability, then each expression of contact between sense and environment expresses a distinct change. It is no surprise, then, that the poetic activities of the symbolists were paralleled and followed by studies in "cultural relativism" such as Spengler's Decline of the West, and studies of the continuities in ancient myths, such as Frazer's Golden Bough. The virtues of Western civilization were no longer taken for granted. There was a distinct inclination toward an attempt to rediscover original values, values that took their form in primal emotional response rather than in carefully grammatical civilized expression.

In a poem from his Lustra collection, "A Song of the Degrees," Pound succeeds in combining the sensory accuracy of imagism with a symbolist awareness of the strengths and limitations of abstract language. In this poem, Pound is able to capture the potential for emotion in perception and set it off against a satiric demonstration of the deficiencies of standard, pseudo-classic poetic diction:

A Song of the Degrees

I

Rest me with the Chinese colours
For I think the glass is evil

II

The wind moves above the wheat
With a silver crashing,
A thin war of metal.

I have known the golden disc,
I have seen it melting above me.
I have known the stone-bright place.
The hall of clear colours.

III

O glass subtly evil, O confusion of colours!
O light bound and bent in, O soul of the captive,
Why am I warned? Why am I sent away?
Why is your glitter full of curious mistrust?
O glass subtle and cunning, O powdery gold!
O filaments of amber, two-faced iridescence!
(EPP, p. 95)

The first section of the poem, consisting of only two lines, is a distillation of its "argument": the next two sections of the poem each expand upon the individual assertions contained in the first two lines. It is transparent from the beginning of this poem that Pound is attempting a study in fairly exact contrasts. The first section of the poem contrasts the "Chinese colours" with "the glass." "Chinese colours" are fresh colors, unimpugned by Western cultural traditions. "The glass is evil," on the other hand, because it reproduces reality second-hand, imitating familiar objects two-dimensionally.

The two following sections develop each of these two statements respectively; however, they clarify the initial statements stylistically rather than argumentatively. Section II offers an extreme use of symbolist style. Section III offers an extreme use of conventional Nineteenth century "pseudo-classic" style.

In the second section of the poem Pound attempts to express the emotional possibilities of the fresh, yet exact, visual imagery summarized in the first line of the first section. He conveys these possibilities by means of a series of associations that create rather than illustrate a relationship between "The wind moves about the wheat" and ". . . the stone-bright place,/ the hall of clear colours." The first in the series of associations Pound effects is to move from "The wind moves about the wheat" to "A thin war of metal." He does this by means of the intermediate image of "With a silver crashing." "Crashing" is an amplification of the noise the wheat makes instigated by the wind. "Silver" is a bit more far-fetched, but it captures a subtle coloration of the wheat and achieves a greater individuation of the sound of the wheat stalks striking one another. The third line, "A thin war of metal," then generalizes "silver crashing." This focus upon metallic imagery is extended into the next two lines, "I have known the golden disc,/ I have seen it

melting above me." The metal, however, is further transformed by "melting" into the heat and light of the sun necessary to illuminate ". . . the hall of clear colours." By a series of subtle, yet defensible, associations between images, Pound is able to celebrate the powers of direct illumination without recourse to either simile or metaphor.

The third section of the poem, though, is almost entirely rhetorical, both in its diction and its metrics. It elaborates upon the phrase, "For I think the glass is evil," in such a heavy-handed manner that its satiric impact is nothing short of blatant. The most overtly artificial literary devices are the copious "O's" which add nothing more than seven useless unstressed syllables, seriously muddling the scansion of the lines. Furthermore, there are the rhetorical questions and the exclamation points, which add nothing to the argument but an artificial aura of emotion. Metrically, the third section also attempts to affect the passion of the classical dactyl. But again, the needless unstressed "O's" undermine the naturalness of the rhythm and reduce the sound of the poem to a turgid gallop. All of this seems quite deliberate on Pound's part. For instance, in his essay, "A Retrospect," Pounds states unequivocally, "If you are using a symmetrical form, don't put in what you want to

say and then fill in the remaining vacuums with slush."¹² Pound systematically violates his own attitude toward good style to display various kinds of poetic inadequacy. Moreover, the image in the mirror limits and distorts the true active potential of the visual image much as artificial rhetoric distorts verbal truth.

The tension that Pound creates between the verbal symbol as active participation in the physical environment and the verbal symbol as enduring category is one of the keys to Pound's poetic efforts. This is a necessary tension, because symbolism as a purely intellectual exercise can lead to an atmosphere of sterility and elitism that is as unacceptable as unimaginative parroting of conventions. In "A Retrospect," Pound is very clear about this: ". . . if a man uses 'symbols' he must use them so that their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that a sense, and the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom, for instance, a hawk is a hawk."¹³ Practically speaking, the value of symbolism as Pound reveals it in "A Song of the Degrees" is that its unfamiliar patterns of image and logic transitions can break the easy flow of rhetoric. This use of symbolist technique can encourage the influence of rhythmic and associative subtitles that seem spontaneous and give a touch of creativity to the

reading of the poem as well as the writing of it. This effort amounts to a conscious "return to the origins"¹⁴ that attempts to recover the inevitable difficulty of the relationship between the world of reality and the world of symbols--a sense of difficulty seemingly lost over the centuries through the development of linguistic sophistication.

II

To keep his aggressive program for the improvement of poetry consistent, Pound has to deny a great deal of the Western cultural and scientific mainstream. His call for a return to the origins, powerful though it is, must perforce ignore the expansion of perceptual boundaries made possible by the "openness" of a modern scientific language. Wallace Stevens, however, is perfectly willing to attempt to bring the built-in ambiguities and generalities of such a language under artistic control and organization. His approach to the problem of perception in poetry also orients itself around the image; but Stevens' images tend to emphasize the spatial element of the image, whereas Pound's tend to emphasize the temporal element. Both poets, though, are concerned with capturing

the immediacy of experience necessary to strike an imaginative spark between perception and poetic expression.

An excellent example of Wallace Stevens' general approach to the problem of perception in his early poetry is his poem "The Snow Man":

The Snow Man

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind
In the sound of a few leaves.

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.¹⁵

The process of perception that occurs in this poem is the inverse of the one that occurs in Ezra Pound's poem, "In a Station of the Metro." It is not a process of perceptual contraction that Stevens' poem narrates. It is, rather, a process of perceptual expansion that begins with the solidity of "To regard the frost and the boughs" and ends in the generality and abstractness of "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is."

The specific perceptual problem that "The Snow Man" faces is that problem of how the mind can both perceive and generalize. The horns of the problem are well expressed by the poem's carefully balanced ambiguity of tone. If the poem is an assertion of the categorically oriented mind, then the poem is negative in tone. If the poem is an assertion of the perceptually oriented mind, then it is positive in tone.

If the "mind of winter" in the first line is simply a metaphor for the mind's capacity to become so purely concerned with categorizing its environment that it loses its ability to feel the "misery of the sound of the wind," the physical environment is thereby reduced to a pure "nothing," an empty medium for the mind's projections. This negative interpretation is a standard critical approach to the poem. This approach is particularly well articulated by Richard Macksey in his article, "The Climates of Wallace Stevens":

The empty place where the "same" wind blows is unaltered by any human conceits, by any human "misery," and yet it is completely realized by the human consciousness. There are two "empty places," the one without and the one within, and yet they are mirror images--"the same place." The bareness through which the wind blows is the bareness of the perceiver (who has evolved in stanza three from viewer to listener, becoming even more passive before the landscape as the poem moves from a spatial to a temporal

dimension). The poverty of the scene and the purity of the observer achieve that algebraic "zero" which Valery in his "Lettre-Preface" to Pere Emile Rideau reserves for his reflexive consciousness . . .¹⁶

Macksey goes on to quote the phenomenological philosopher Merleau-Ponty to preface his summary of the significance of the poem: "'La denomination des objets me vient pas apres la reconnaissance, elle est la reconnaissance meme.'" It is in ambiguous space that 'the snow man' finally takes shape, not as an object in the world but as a creation of the poet."¹⁷ This view of the poem is plausible, but it places too heavy a burden upon the rhetorical power of Stevens' language to assert a particular order upon experience, thus reducing the poem to pure symbolism. This attempt to extend the basically null content of the verbal category onto the expressions of life is an unfortunately weak reversal of the basically honest principles of scientific observation and speculation originally advocated by Aristotle. There is no interaction with the environment in this reading, only imposition.

To attempt to see the poem as an assertion of the mind as an instrument of perception, however, is a more positive alternative reading. In this more positive reading the "mind" of the first line asserts no categorical transcendency. Rather, it enters into the activity

of winter so cleanly that it is freed from the ordinary anthropomorphic association of "misery" with bare winter scenes. However, while a "mind of winter" in this sense has surrendered its transcendency and the attendant solipsism, it still maintains the power to extend and generalize. This generalizing process manifests itself in the poem as a gradual transition from nouns that denote fairly specific categories modified by concrete participles, such as "pine-trees crusted with snow," to nouns that denote far more general categories, such as "same place." In much the same manner, the formal but personal pronoun "one" becomes distanced as a "listener" whose identity is a product of his activity of listening. "Distanced" here means that the initial assumed identity of the "one" in the first line of the poem is gradually transformed into a concept of activity that as the object of the preposition "for" is a product of the generalizing action described by the poem. If "the listener" is such a product of winter rather than its source, he is not necessarily passive. He has, instead, a mind transformed by participation with the physical process of winter documented by the poem's concrete visual images. If "the listener" is such a product of interaction with winter rather than the categorical source of a metaphorical winter, then the two "nothings" in the last line of the poem are

fundamentally different. Instead of identifying the null categories of the mind with a nullity in the environment, the two "nothings" are able to express a vital dialogue between the nominal and revelatory activities of language. From this view, then, the "Nothing that is not there" is merely a tautological and purely nominal means of saying "everything that is there" in a world of words isolated from the physical environment. "The nothing that is," on the other hand, announces itself with its definite article as simply "not a thing." The only entity in the poem that is "not a thing" is the "mind of winter"; thus it "is," it exists within the being of the environment, and, as such a being, aims toward concretion. There is no paradox, then, in the listener being nothing himself if the listener loses his separateness from the event of winter and participates as the mind's ability to "behold" the scene as an image extending within the physical environment. Such a "mind of winter" can partake of the mind's reflexive and generalizing powers without sacrificing the revelatory power of perceptual images.

A key to this process is the verb "behold." As Stevens employs it in the poem, "behold" expresses a generalized, yet concrete awareness which combines the senses of seeing and hearing. In the first half of the

poem, "behold" is juxtaposed with "regard," a primarily visual verb. In the second half of the poem, though, "behold" is juxtaposed with "listen," which is of course an aural verb. In "behold," then, these two sense activities flow together in an expression that is more general than either but by no means transcendently abstract. The percipient in the poem is synthesized out of his activity from the vague "one" at the beginning. Likewise the environment as "the sound of a few leaves" which make "the sound of the land" for the listener is the unifying contact between the wind and the land. At the highest level of contact, the contact between the percipient and his environment is expressed as the necessary "mind of winter," a hub of activity that organizes its components without attempting an intellectual decision between them. By energizing a constructive dialectical interchange within the confines of an English sentence, a basic rhetorical unit, Stevens is able to capture the tension and change upon which narration thrives so that he may use the categorical language of the Western scientific tradition to demonstrate a process of perception.

Both Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens are challenging poets, but neither pursues the incomprehensible for its own sake. They simply believe that the problem of

perception is a difficult one for poetry, and their work reflects this difficulty. The poetry of Pound and Stevens seeks a poetic experience of perception made constantly new by appropriating the flux between language and perception to the inevitable flux and evolution of life. Such an enterprise seeks as its unity a living balance capable of envisioning pattern as a process of growth rather than a simple repetition of static form. The primal movement of this living balance is the movement from concentration to expansion and back again, the expansive and contractive continuum of the living breath organized around a creative center toward whose constancy of change the art of perception inevitably inclines.

NOTES

¹Wallace Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 14.

²Ezra Pound, The Letters of Ezra Pound, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1950), p. 6.

³Ezra Pound, Literary Essays of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 3.

⁴Ezra Pound, Personae, the Collected Poems of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1926), p. 109. All further references to Personae will be given as page numbers in parentheses and marked EPP.

⁵Ezra Pound, Literary Essays, p. 4.

⁶Herbert Schneidau, Ezra Pound, the Image and the Real (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 22.

⁷Ezra Pound, The Letters of Ezra Pound, p. 48.

⁸Ezra Pound, Literary Essays, p. 217.

⁹Ezra Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska, a Memoir (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 84.

¹⁰A recently published philosophical article by Robert Bolton, "Essentialism and Semantic Theory in Aristotle," Philosophical Review, 85(1976), 528, gives some detailed background for this problem. In his article, Bolton shows how Aristotle is able to dispense with the Platonic insistence upon a fundamental difference between a thing as it is and a thing as it is represented:

To help us understand Aristotle's doctrine of signification here it will be helpful to compare his theory of definition briefly with Plato's. Plato makes no

distinction between nominal and real definition. Genuine kind-terms signify kinds by connoting or revealing those kinds. So, for Plato, there is no explaining what a kind-term signifies, giving a nominal definition, without displaying the kind which it does signify, giving a real definition. This requires that we understand the correct account of the nature of a given kind as soon as we understand the significance of its name, and those who do not know what some kind is cannot in any reliable way identify the kind or any of its instances (Republic, 476 c-d). Aristotle denies this doctrine, however, and holds that one can reliably identify a given kind and instances of it without knowing, even implicitly, what the structure of the kind is. This moves him to split the signifying and revealing functions of kind-terms. (emphasis added)

It is clear from Bolton's analysis that the distancing of language from the complexities of direct perception by abstraction increases the power of language to postulate possible categories of objects and events that may or may not be confirmed by the physical observation of particular examples.

Aristotle, of course, had no intention of abandoning the actual occurrence in his focus upon the practical power of the nominal definition. However, in order to establish a medium for an understanding of both nominal and revealed reality he needed a concept of human contact with the physical environment. According to Bolton, on p. 530 of his article, Aristotle solves this problem of mediation between the nominal definition and actual particulars by his appeal to the notion of experience:

Experience (according to Aristotle) is a type of systematized memory, and as such involves a knowledge of a universal which is not detached from the knowledge of and memory of actual particulars. The specification of such a universal requires a reference to particulars though not by name or by references to uniquely identifying characteristics.

This Aristotelian "experience" generalizes human contact with reality, making such contact a fund of possibilities as well as actualities. Such an attitude toward language is a tremendous benefit to scientific speculation, to be sure, because it projects a potential order upon awareness.

However, this view can cause some problems for artistic perception. According to this doctrine of signification, primary emphasis in the human's sensual contact with the world is not upon the multiplicities of the perception itself, but upon the most familiar aspects of appearance that call a perceptual category into the memory. This close connection between language and memory, founded upon recurring symbols for categories, seems to establish the power of language to project a rule of order imbedded in its own consistency upon the world at large. Experience, as Aristotle conceives of it, seems to draw the experiencing individual away from the problematic appearances of the actual world, making it easier for him to see the world in terms of scientific or political laws. And, adherence to these laws can turn poets, as the most expert practitioners of language, into propagandists for the status quo rather than visionary adventurers.

¹¹Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1919), pp. 46-47.

¹²Ezra Pound, Literary Essays, p. 7.

¹³Ezra Pound, Literary Essays, p. 9.

¹⁴Ezra Pound, Literary Essays, p. 92.

¹⁵Wallace Stevens, The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), pp. 7-8. All further references will be given as page numbers in parentheses and marked CP.

¹⁶Richard Macksey, "The Climates of Wallace Stevens," in The Act of the Mind, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce and J. Hillis Miller (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), p. 197.

¹⁷Macksey, p. 199.

CHAPTER TWO

POUND AND LIVING TIME: THE RHYTHM OF IMAGES

IN CATHAY

Ezra Pound has left a paradoxical artistic record. For his entire lifetime he vigorously proselytized his version of the "classics," yet he was every bit as energetic in his demands for uncompromising modernism in poetry, music, sculpture, painting, and novels. Needless to say, such a complex artist has left a legacy that has encouraged the compatible rise of widely divergent attitudes, even among those who find a great deal of value in his work. For instance, in his two books on Pound, Ezra Pound and Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor, Donald Davie portrays him as a wizard at versification whose belief in an ordered world makes him more of an Eighteenth century poet than a Twentieth century one.¹ In his book The Pound Era, on the other hand, Hugh Kenner sees Pound as one of the visionary inhabitants of Buckminster Fuller's dymaxion world of the future.² We need to attempt some resolution of this conflict. One possible way to do this is to demonstrate how Pound is able to straddle the gulf between past and

future through his vision of living time--a vision of a poetry that attempts to see time as concrete rhythm rather than abstract chronological succession.

I

From beginning to end, Ezra Pound's poetry is a poetry of process and change. The poem that stands first in Personae, "The Tree," one of Pound's first mature poems, is a poem about the metamorphosis necessary for a new and clearer perception:

The Tree

I stood still and was a tree amid the wood,
 Knowing the truth of things unseen before;
 Of Daphne and the laurel bough
 And of that god-feasting couple old
 That grew elm-oak amid the wold.
 'Twas not until the gods had been
 Kindly entreated, and had been brought
 Within the hearth of their heart's home
 That they might do this wonder thing;
 Nathless I have been a tree amid the wood
 And many a new thing understood
 That was rank folly to my head before.
 (EPP, p. 3)

The key element in this poem is the process that it reveals, and the metamorphic implications of that process. This discovery, and it is a central one for Pound, is that the truth and relevance of mythic narrative is a function of unfettered physical contact with the environment. The great myths are not just cultural artifacts;

they are narrative responses to the mystery of living process, and their energies are available to anyone willing to attempt conscious participation in that living process. This participation brings the gods "unto the hearth"; and the gift of transformation that they bestow is a metamorphosis into creative contact with physical reality.

But the young Pound also had highly civilized cultural ambitions, so the language of transformation runs through his early poems like rivulets on the boundary between doubt and belief. With each poem he tries on a new identity, examines another time and style. Yet there is something missing. Each new poem is an experiment, but it is a self-conscious experiment, a new costume in a mirror, a new musical instrument without accompaniment. There is no sense of unity; each poem is a deliberate surprise, but a surprise almost for the sake of surprise. The vigor of change is there, but it is a change that is harsh, almost arbitrary. Pound's problem at this point in his career was to find an original power of expression capable of orchestrating his genius for assimilation. This must have been a particularly vexing problem for him. The strength of the Western poetic tradition lay in its emphasis on individuality and uniqueness of statement. Yet at the turn of the century this very individuality

in the hands of the English Decadents and the French Symbolists was often considered simply social eccentricity. America and Europe at the beginning of the Twentieth century were providing far more social support to the development of technology than to the development of the traditional arts. The rapid expansion of technology was making possible the standardization of the items that were being commercially produced. The speed with which such standardized items could be produced made more extensive distribution not only feasible but desirable. Change, in an atmosphere of burgeoning trade in manufactured goods and incipient mass production, gradually came to be more and more a matter of arithmetical growth rather than organic growth.

A difficult societal climate for innovative poetry is almost taken for granted now, but for the young Ezra Pound, arriving in London to breathe the heady atmosphere of what he felt should be the hub of the world's activity, it was a bitter revelation. His initial response was reactive rather than active as he too took artistic refuge in a desperate individuality of expression. However, Pound's individuality was the product of his ability to assimilate both ancient and modern influences. He started showing his talent for synthesis early on as he combined the vigor and social eccentricity of the

Decadents such as Oscar Wilde with the scholarly acumen of the pre-Raphaelites. Pound became a troubadour, determined to force passion upon a world that seemed to have little stomach for it. This vigorous posture is well-captured by the blood and bones of his Provencal adaptation, "Sestina: Altaforte." (See Appendix, p.185 for full text of the poem.) "Sestina: Altaforte" is the poem of a poet determined to wrest from life a consistent emotion at all costs. It is a barbaric roar against smug mediocrity, an assertion of willingness to sacrifice the very body for the vigor of conflict. It also asserts the existence of the one sure pattern within even the most problematic perception, the pattern of emotion. In this poem Pound is discovering and asserting the sure relation between the "motions" of the earth and human e-motions. Hugh Witemeyer is very much to the point when he says of this poem, "In the second and fourth stanzas, the speaker praises summer and dawn because he sees in them the strife that he loves. Ruskin's 'pathetic fallacy' is reborn as 'metaphor by sympathy' in Pound's theory and practice."³ The speaker in "Sestina: Altaforte" has intensified his passion to the point of discovering a parallel in the intensity and change expressed by the earth itself. Such an outburst of emotion is capable of demonstrating a natural pattern that breaks through

civilized restraint like the slashing of a sword. In his barbaric excitement de Born does not hesitate to compare the rising of his passion to the rising of the sun.

And I love to see the sun rise blood-crimson
 And I watch his spears through the dark clash
 And it fills my heart with rejoicing
 And pries wide my mouth with fast music
 When I see him so scorn and defy peace,
 His lone might 'against all darkness opposing.
 (EPP, p. 29)

In his "digging up" of the brawling style of the Provencal troubadour Betrans de Born, Pound discovers and asserts what happens when a man gets close enough to the natural elements to infuse himself with their power, a power in style that parallels de Born's praise of war in the Twelfth century with Pound's praise of the war of emotion in an Edwardian England infatuated with what Pound has called "the cult of the innocuous."⁴ Here it is quite clear that Pound is discovering that there may be a way of interaction with natural forces that does not necessitate taking either a manipulative or a defeatist attitude in the face of nature. By facing the forces within and without himself that best conduct natural energies in a courageous way, the human being can tap into a powerful energy that "pries wide my mouth with fast music."

It should be obvious that what Pound is determined to express through poems such as "Sestina: Altaforte"

is not a transformation wrought through a Wordsworthian reflection upon the power and acts of nature. To Pound, that approach is indicative of the distancing effect of fastidious rhetoric. Even so, "Sestina: Altaforte," for all its courageous assertion, is still a negative statement. Despite the natural vigor that it embodies, it still carries the unmistakable aura of simple intellectual "shock effect." It still strikes one as anti-social, even in the aftermath of two world wars. What Pound still needed at this time was a consistent social vision that could give him a humanistic grounding for narrative poetry based on the changeability of human emotions. Pound's vision was radical, but it needed grounding to obtain the consistency necessary to make it a viable alternative to rhetorical emptiness.

II

The most fortuitous circumstance that led Pound to a vision of order to match his vision of energy was his work as the literary executor of the estate of Ernest Fenollosa. Fenollosa started his academic career as a Harvard Hegelian, and a representative of the most hopeful tendencies of the movement. His belief in the desirability of a synthesis between the cultures of East and

West took him to Japan as a visiting professor. While there, he realized from his perspective as an outsider that the Japanese were dispensing with much that was vital and beautiful in their culture in a rush to appropriate Western ideas. Fenollosa undertook to remedy the situation, and led expeditions to salvage ancient artifacts. His efforts so pleased the Japanese that he was made a minister of culture for the regime. Upon his return to the United States, he lectured and wrote extensively on the value of Japanese and Chinese art and culture, dying in 1908 and leaving a mass of uncollated manuscripts.⁵ His widow, Mary Fenollosa, was conversant enough with the material on the visual arts to organize that material herself. However, there was a fairly large amount of material having to do with Chinese and Japanese language, drama, and poetry with which she was far less comfortable. Through fortunate circumstances that are still not totally clear,⁶ these materials fell into the hands of the brash American poet, Ezra Pound, giving him a much-needed key in his search for ways to extend the power of imagistic perception so that it could break the bonds of simple uncoordinated idiosyncrasy and expand the narrative power of the image.

The most theoretically valuable item in the collection for Pound was an essay entitled, "The Chinese Written

Character as a Medium for Poetry." In his introduction to the main argument, Fenollosa makes a disclaimer that makes Pound's affection for him very understandable:

I feel that I should perhaps apologize for presuming to follow in that series of brilliant scholars, Davis, Legge, St. Denys and Giles, who have treated the subject of Chinese poetry with a wealth of erudition to which I can proffer no claim. It is not as a professional linguist nor as a sinologue that I humbly put forward what I have to say. As an enthusiastic student of beauty in Oriental culture, having spent a large portion of my years in close relation with Orientals, I could not but breathe in something of the poetry incarnated in their lives.⁷

It is obvious from this statement that Fenollosa intended no philological objectivity. He was immersed in the culture of a people with "poetry incarnated in their lives." Such a position could hardly fail to strike a similar chord in Ezra Pound, who was becoming increasingly aware of the need to redeem the emotive power of language and capture not only the text of the past but the living spirit of the text, the "living spirit" that gives credibility to "Sestina: Altaforte" despite its harshness.

In the essay itself, Fenollosa makes the radical yet consistent argument needed by Pound. Fenollosa sees the primary weakness of Western language to be its dependence on an abstract system of symbols and logic that can too easily divorce itself from the actual experiences of life.

I have mentioned the tyranny of medieval logic. According to this European logic though is a kind of brickyard. It is baked into little hard units or concepts. These are piled in rows according to size and then labeled with words for future use. This use consists of picking out a few bricks, each by its convenient label, and sticking them together in a sort of wall called a sentence by the use of either white mortar for the positive copula "is," or of black mortar for the negative copula "is not." In this way we produce such admirable propositions as "A ring-tailed baboon is not a consitutional assembly."

...It is evident that this process of abstraction may be carried on indefinitely and with all sorts of material. We may go on forever building pyramids of attenuated concept until we reach the apex "being."⁸

This aggressive statement no doubt confirmed for Pound the accuracy of his poetic attack on the flaccidity of "civilized" rhetoric contained in such poems as "Sestina: Altaforte" and "Ballad of the Goodly Fere." However, Fenollosa's concern is not wholly negative. He finds in his version of the Chinese poetic and linguistic system an alternative tradition in which he feels that natural phenomena and language symbol have been able to maintain a living interchange. Here is the gist of his argument:

But Chinese notation is something much more than arbitrary symbols. It is based upon a vivid shorthand of the operations of nature. In the algebraic figure and in the spoken word there is no natural connection between thing and sign: all depends upon sheer convention. But the Chinese method follows natural

suggestion. First stands the man on his two legs. Second, his eye moves through space: a bold figure represented by running legs under an eye, a modified picture of an eye, a modified picture of running legs but unforgettable once you have seen it. Third stands the horse on his four legs.

The thought picture is not only called up by these signs as well as by words but far more vividly and concretely. Legs belong to all three characters: they are alive. The group holds something of the quality of a continuous moving picture.⁹

Of course, in terms of what is presently known of the Chinese language Fenollosa's radical theory is, at best, a gross over-simplification. We now know that only ten percent of Chinese characters contain overt visual clues to their meaning, and that Chinese has undergone phonological change as surely as any other language. However, as his initial disclaimer indicates, philological caution and objectivity were not Fenollosa's intentions in writing the essay. It was a frankly emotional response to what he felt was a culture that had maintained a continuous relationship with the sources of its emotions by using a language infused with sense perception. Thus it is not too difficult for the modern sinologist Achilles Fang to write an article pointing out the numerous, and sometimes outrageous, mistakes that Fenollosa and Pound make in details of scholarship while still maintaining a respect for the energy and inspiration of the enterprise itself. Fang sums up the attitude of scholars as sympathetic as

himself when he quotes Shigeyoshi Obata, "who with regard to the genesis of The Works of Li Po (New York, 1922), in which Yu-lan Fung acknowledgedly cooperated, states as follows, 'I confess that it was Mr. Pound's little book (Cathay) that exasperated me and at the same time awakened me to the realization of new possibilities so that I began to do translation work myself.'"¹⁰ The implication of the admission of Obata documented by Fang is that Pound, as inspired by Fenollosa, can be "exasperating" in detail, but his intuition of the power of general tendencies in Chinese thought and expression has much to offer.

But how could such an intuition come about? In order to understand this approach to Chinese literary tradition by Pound, it is necessary to return to the same fascination for Provencal poetry that produced "Sestina: Altaforte." His study of the Twelfth century troubadour poets was the first major scholarly activity that Pound embarked upon. By briefly examining his study in this area, we can perhaps more precisely discover the means by which Pound is able to harness the violently vigorous energies of "Sestina: Altaforte" into a more legitimate "alternative tradition." It was from his study of Provence, from which evolved his full-length book, The Spirit of Romance, that Pound adduced his theory of the intimate kinship of poetry and music. Particularly inspiring to Pound was his realization that

the poets of Provençal, notably Arnaut Daniel, had developed a use of sound that could imitate with a great deal of success the activities of nature,¹¹ thus establishing the sound and rhythms of music as intermediaries between man and his physical environment. Also quite intriguing for Pound was the Provençal convention of the trobar clus, a calculated ambiguity in a song that encouraged interpretation of it employing differing levels of abstraction. These different levels of interpretation, though, were almost always grounded in the wooing of a lady for sexual favors. This focus on the sexual embodied in the Provençal poetry is a key aspect of Pound's "return to the origins." As he puts it in his short essay "The Tradition,"

A return to origins invigorates because it is a return to nature and reason. The man who returns to origins does so because he wishes to behave in the eternally sensible manner. That is to say, naturally, reasonably, intuitively. He does not wish to do the right thing in the wrong place, to "hang an ox with trappings," as Dante puts it. He wishes not pedagogy, but harmony, the fitting thing.¹²

Pound obviously sees a natural "harmony" in the unity of physical reality, of which sex is a primal and literally originative expression. The tapestries of meaning in the Provençal poems radiate from this physical basis and their sounds remain true to the vibrations of the living environment. This expression of physical power is for Pound

the manifestation of an inherent truthfulness, a truthfulness that language can literally take hold of by remaining true to its very physical origins. For Pound, the only way that language can convey true perception and thereby tell an honest story is by its participation with the basic strength of living bodies in action. That is, language exists to be spoken, to rise out of the wet, open mouth; and insofar as language departs from this basic contact with the senses, then it inclines toward deceit. This attitude is at the heart of Pound's concern to attack what he considered "mushiness" and "rhetoric" in poetry, philology in scholarship, and later, to his distress and defamation, usury in economics. All of the above mentioned activities represent for Pound an alienation of symbol systems from the experience of the physical necessary for their verifiability. His statement in his essay, "Troubadours, Their Sorts and Conditions," is an accurate summation of his position, "When men began to write on tablets and ceased singing to the barbitos, a loss of some sort was unavoidable."¹³

It is clear from the preceding that no matter how much Pound could subsequently refer to Fenollosa both in practice and in theory, he was certainly emotionally and aesthetically prepared to receive Fenollosa's doctrine. Fenollosa's work not only confirmed Pound's negative

views about the poetic environment contemporaneous with him, but provided him with a positive direction for new growth in his powers of poetic perception. But how could Pound put these new insights to use and activate the perceptual and transitive aesthetics that Fenollosa had so clearly articulated? One important implication of the active syntax¹⁴ that Fenollosa proposes for Chinese in his essay is that such language does not express the act of perception as instantaneous. Instead, the expression "man sees horse" is given as a temporal process, with the eye on running legs connecting the man with the horse. Of course, this is the same kind of dissection of the moment that Pound is capable of employing in "In a Station of the Metro," so the possibilities must have seemed enormous for Pound at the time. Unfortunately, Pound knew no Chinese whatsoever and, to quote Fang, "Fenollosa rarely applies his heretical notions of the Chinese language when it comes to the poems contained in Cathay";¹⁵ so, when Pound set out to develop, from Fenollosa's notes, the poems that would eventually be collected under the title Cathay he had to effect some sort of compromise. The compromise that evolved for Pound emerges in the poems of Cathay as a striking innovation in sound. In Cathay, one of the ways Pound succeeds in narrating his perceptions is by the consistent employment of "musical" rhythms

generally thought to be awkward or unnatural in English, such as trochees, dactyls and spondees. Because of his belief in the basic importance of music for poetry, Pound had been experimenting with these rhythms for some time. However, he was usually careful to place the poems in a "historical" or alien context by means of Latin titles, Browningsque "dramatic" subtitles or localized diction. These devices, though, tend to isolate one poem from another. This helps to account for the disorganized eclecticism displayed by Pound's collections of poetry up to the time of Cathay. With Cathay, though, Pound makes his first step toward a connection from poem to poem that respects the autonomy of each poem as an emotional expression. Each poem is an individual contribution to a larger composition, much as a single theme might fit into the score of a sonata or a symphony. This approach to narrative unity means that externally imposed linear time and the determinative causality that linear time enforces can no longer apply. Each new perception is a single change within a larger pattern of changes. There can be no isolated perception from which to frame absolute laws in such a connected system. The change necessary for the passage of time is generated by the rhythm of perception itself as a pattern of sensible contact with a living physical world. Pound believes that "all ages are contemporaneous" not

because differing ages deal with identical social or intellectual problems, but because each age must make the same response to the challenge that the physical environment offers. No matter what its supposed sophistication, no age can produce great culture without dealing with the most immediate and concrete exigencies of life. For Pound's Cathay, this physical response is necessarily rhythmic and musical, an attempt to capture the rhythms of the microcosmic emotional changes that harmonize with the macrocosmically rhythmic motions of the changing days and seasons.

Through Fenollosa, Pound discovered a positive foundation for his intuition that language could best express truth by participating as closely as possible in the body's immediate sensory response to the environment. This was possible because Pound found in China a civilization built upon the sense of change that Fenollosa found infusing their most basic linguistic statements. It is this perception of the natural rhythm of life valued by the Chinese that shows how Fenollosa's specific translation theory could be incorrect but his general aesthetic intuition could be quite correct, an intuition that Pound's success with Cathay confirms.

The basis of Pound's mobilization of musical rhythms in Cathay, though, is not Chinese in origin at all. It

is, instead, Pound's awareness of the possibilities inherent in English syntax, possibilities that allow him to creatively overcome the difficulty that other writers, such as Longfellow and Swinburne, had in adapting classical meters to English. Their efforts were more often than not rightly criticized as too arbitrary and artificial. Pound felt, however, that even the galloping dactyls of Swinburne were preferable to the standard practice of conveying historical or cultural significance in poetry by means of ponderous and stilted diction, a method he considered defunct and even dangerous. A prophetic statement that he made in this vein while commenting on various translations of Homer deserves citation here:

And I do not think this a trifle; it
 would be an ill day if men again let
 the classics go by the board; we should
 fall into something worse than, or as
 bad as, the counter-reformation: a
 welter of gum-shoes, and cocoa, and
 Y.M.C.A. and Webbs, and social theor-
 izing committees, and the general hell
 of a groggy doctrinaire obfuscation;
 and the very disagreeablizing of the
 classics, every pedagogy which puts
 the masterwork further from us, either
 by obstructing the schoolboy, or
 breeding affectation in dilettante
 readers, works toward such a detestible
 end.¹⁶

Obviously, Pound wanted no part of pedantic conventions that had already proved themselves wrong in any case. The obvious alternative was simplicity and variety, and that was the path he chose.

Pound's prime device for rhythm in Cathay is, of course, vers libre. "Free" verse it may be, but it is anything but random. Throughout his letters and critical essays Pound adamantly contends that rhythm must have meaning. For Pound, there must be "a rhythm, that is, in poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed."¹⁷ The precise use that rhythm has in Cathay is to confirm the emotions of the individual or individuals described in the poem. It is a truism in English prosody that the iamb is the most natural rhythm for the English speaking voice; and it is, for rational and formal purposes, since the rising tone at the end of a phrase can mark a point or emphasize a summation. Under the strain of emotion, though, the rhythms of speech are hardly so regular. Pound takes advantage of this fact in Cathay, using combinations of dactyls, trochees and spondees to inject a syncopation into the lines to give them the regularity of musical movement while still maintaining enough irregularity to confirm emotional tension.¹⁸ Pound's rhythmic system employs a curious twist. By dispensing with ponderous diction and iambic stress he makes the poems seem less "poetical" and more conversational when in fact their rhythms reflect the employment of a highly "classical" poetics. This impression of familiarity contrived out

of complexity succeeds because the rhythmic innovations do not build anything more complicated than fairly direct and transitive English sentences. As Donald Davie says in his book, Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor, the melody of Cathay "is less a matter of meter than of syntax."¹⁹ This direct English syntax, with its multiple means of establishing grammatical relationships, provides a mobile and organic frame that Pound can stretch and contract at will to achieve a unity of semantic and rhythmic meaning from line to line. In this way Pound can assure that the emotion that each expresses is emergent rather than illustrative. That is, the emotion of each poem does not exist in association with an idea but rather shapes itself as the poem progresses.

An excellent example of how Pound can use this expansion and contraction of rhythmic phrase consistently is the first poem in the Cathay series, "The Song of the Bowmen of Shu."

Song of the Bowmen of Shu

Here we are, picking the first fern-shoots
And saying: When shall we get back to
our country?
Here we are because we have the Ken-nin for our
foemen,
We have no comfort because of these Mongols.
We grub the soft fern-shoots,
When anyone says "Return," the others are full of
sorrow.
Sorrowful minds, sorrow is strong, we are hungry
and thirsty.

Our defence is not yet made sure, no one can let
 his friend return.
 We grub the old fern-stalks.
 We say: Will we be let to go back in October?
 There is no ease in royal affairs, we have no comfort.
 Our sorrow is bitter, but we would not return to
 our country.
 What flower has come into blossom?
 Whose chariot? The General's.
 Horses, his horses even, are tired. They were
 strong.
 We have no rest, three battles a month.
 By heaven, his horses are tired.
 The generals are on them, the soldiers are by them.
 The horses are well trained, the generals have ivory
 arrows and quivers ornamented with fish-skin.
 The enemy is swift, we must be careful.
 When we set out, the willows were drooping with
 spring,
 We come back in the snow,
 We go slowly, we are hungry and thirsty,
 Our mind is full of sorrow, who will know of our
 grief?

(EPP, p. 127)

The poem is a series of simple and direct statements and questions, beginning with the simple existential statement, "Here we are, picking the first fern-shoots," which then transforms into a question, "And saying: When shall we get back to our country?" This is simple and straightforward English diction, yet it reads in a highly stressed trochaic meter which runs counter to the calm familiarity of the surface syntax. This repressed emotion gradually breaks into dactylic as the speaker transmutes the energy of his repressed feeling into a pro forma justification for the fighting, "We have no comfort because of these Mongols." But this flow contracts immediately with the next line, "We grub the soft fern-shoots." Every four to

five lines, throughout "Song of the Bowmen of Shu," the movement of the lines is punctuated by the insertion of a concrete observation such as this. This rhythmic expansion and contraction is the schematic of an emotion in action. The voice of the poem oscillates between expressiveness and laconism, openness and closure, a very physical manifestation of doubt and uncertainty. This poem deliberately avoids the normal intellectual contrivances of poetry such as simile and metaphor; its simplicity is its greatest artifice. It is the artifice of the ordinary man determined to maintain his active powers of observation even in the most desperate circumstances.

"Song of the Bowmen of Shu" makes an excellent example of Pound's use of rhythm as a narrative device because he translated it in quite a different way some forty years later as "Ode 167" in his translation of The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius. As "Ode 167," the hesitation is largely gone, and the rhythm is jaunty: "Pick a fern, pick a fern, ferns are high,/ 'Home,' I'll say: home the year's gone by."²⁰ By the time of the second version, Pound is obviously more aware of the original Chinese poem and the scholarly theories surrounding it. In his very helpful commentary on the accuracy of the translations in Cathay, Ezra Pound's Cathay, Wai-lim Yip asserts that this poem is generally considered to be a

propaganda piece, written in anticipation of the hardships of a campaign to exhort the men to heroism and self-sacrifice.²¹ Pound takes this into account in his later version and transforms his original soliloquy of uncertainty into a marching song. However, as Yip clearly points out, Pound places both versions in the present tense.²² Even though he incorporates more of the possible original circumstances for the poem in his second version, Pound's central concern is the immediate response of the fighting men to their environment. Moreover, this response is, in both cases, rhythmic and emotional.

This emphasis on the contact between rhythms and emotions in Cathay is not limited to the poems that concern common people. In "Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin" the subject matter is the decadence of the upper class.

Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin

March has come to the bridge head,
 Peach boughs and apricot boughs hang
 over a thousand gates,
 At morning there are flowers to cut the heart,
 And evening drives them on the eastward-flowing
 waters.
 Petals are on the gone waters and on the going,
 And on the back-swirling eddies,
 But to-day's men are not the men of the old days,
 Though they hang in the same way over the bridge-
 rail.

The sea's colour moves at the dawn
 And the princes still stand in rows, about the throne,
 And the moon falls over the portals of Sei-go-yo,
 And clings to the walls and the gate-top.
 With head gear glittering against the cloud and sun,

The lords go forth from the court, and into far
borders.

They ride upon dragon-like horses,
Upon horses with head-trappings of yellow metal,
And the streets make way for their passage.

Haughty their passing.

Haughty their steps as they go in to great banquets,
To high halls and curious food,
To the perfumed air and girls dancing,
To clear flutes and clear singing;
To the dance of the seventy couples;
To the mad chase through the gardens.
Night and day are given over to pleasure
And they think it will last a thousand autumns,

Unwearying autumns.

For them the yellow dogs howl portents in vain,
And what are they compared to the lady Riokushu,

That was cause of hate!

Who among them is a man like Han-rei

Who departed alone with his mistress,

With his hair unbound, and he his own skiffman!

(EPP, pp. 131-132)

In Pound's translation the narrator is obviously someone caught up in the difficulties of his environment as surely as the soldiers in "Song of the Bowmen of Shu." The rhythmic and emotional development of "Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin," however, is the opposite of "Song of the Bowmen of Shu." In "Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin," the syntax, instead of contracting to laconic utterances, becomes more expansive as the poem moves along. Each description seems to contain more detail than the former one. Given this more complicated syntax, there is ample opportunity for Pound to employ sophisticated verse patterns based upon a clever use of rhythm. For instance, the first line, "March has come to the bridge head," (EPP, p. 131) begins with a trochee, "March has"; then it moves to a

dactyl, "come to the"; and it finishes on a spondee, "bridge head." In the next line, "Peach boughs and apricot boughs hang/ over a thousand gates," Pound even attempts some vowel assonance to give the line the flavor of a classical quantitative verse unit. The peak of this intricate effort seems to come in the line "Petals are on the gone waters and on the going,/ And on the back-swirling eddies." Here Pound seems to be trying to effect a complex synthesis between his belief in "absolute rhythm," his classical scholarship, and his fascination for the concrete energy carried by the Chinese ideogram. The classically influenced, yet musically varied rhythms flow with the uneven current of the passing stream.

But then the thought of the poem takes an abrupt turn, "But to-day's men are not the men of the old days, Though they hang in the same way over the bridge-/ rail." However, there is no object for comparison immediately given. The correctness of this intuition grows, however, by continual syntactic and rhythmic accumulation throughout the poem. The poem as it goes on becomes more and more repetitive, and the rhythms which seem so clever in their imitation of natural processes at the beginning of the poem degenerate into an anaphoric recitation of bored indulgence in court pleasures. The intuition of the ninth line gradually becomes clearer. No matter how intricate

and successful imitations are, they eventually become empty and passive repetition without contact with a fresh and vitalizing spirit born out of contact with living events and emotions, a spirit that can generate the self-initiated activity that the poem provides in the last lines,

And what are they compared to the lady Riokushu,
 That was cause of hate!
 Who among them is a man like Han-rei
 Who departed alone with his mistress,
 With her hair unbound, and he his own skiffsman!
 (EPP, p. 132)

The rhythms are now associated with an image of activity, a woman who could cause real emotions and a man who could defy convention to get what he wanted. The strong stresses are still there, particularly at the end of the lines, but now their vigor energizes a real action instead of an imitative repetition.

In this poem Pound does an impressive job of synthesis. He demonstrates his ability to reproduce classical meters in both a quantitative and qualitative fashion, yet he associates that reproduction with a cultural climate that can demonstrate how empty such imitation can be if it loses contact with the concrete feelings that vitalize it in the first place. He brings several cultural planes into relation and in their interaction they show concretely the difference between true refinement for the sake of basic feelings and emotions and false refinement for the sake of external fashion and ornament.

There might seem to be a great deal of difference between the worlds of the uncertain soldier of "Song of the Bowmen of Shu" and the indulgent courtiers of "Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin." In truth there is not; and it is this emotional contact between divergent poems of divergent intellectual and social realms that is one of the major narrative triumphs of Cathay. Both the courtier and the soldier are isolated and alienated from their source of strength and sincere emotion. The alienation they feel, however, has no resemblance to the alienation expressed by Western writers of the Twentieth century. It is nothing so abstract. The feeling expressed in both "Song of the Bowmen of Shu" and "Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin" comes across as a palpable tension between the man and his environment. For these men, "home" is no arbitrary place of residence. It is rather the source of strength for the whole being in both a physical and emotional way. And in neither of these poems is the speaker "at home." For the simple soldiers, their uncertainty derives from their physical separation from their homeland. For the more abstract and sophisticated courtiers, their uncertainty derives out of their separation from their vital traditions, which have degenerated into empty repetition.

Indeed, in each of the poems in the original edition of Cathay²³ the central emotion expressed is a variation on this theme of separation. "The Beautiful Toilet" tells of the loneliness of a matron who "was a courtesan in the old days" (EPP, p. 124) and is now abandoned by a drunken husband. "The River Song" is about a court poet neglected by the emperor. "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter" portrays a young wife waiting in a dignified manner for her long overdue husband. In "The Jewel Stairs Grievance" a woman waits in vain for a rendezvous with her lover. "The Lament of the Frontier Guard" is the story of a lonely soldier at an isolated outpost. "Exile's Letter" is the regretful correspondence of a political casualty. In the "Four Poems of Departure" each describes a different sort of leave-taking: one between lovers, two between friends, and one between a man and his home city. The final poem in the original sequence, "South-Fold in Cold Country," follows the pattern of "Song of the Bowmen of Shu" in documenting the homesickness of soldiers who must fight in an alien climate.

In all of these stories of isolation, however, the isolated individual never feels completely out of contact from what he feels isolated from. That is, there is no expression in these poems of the Western intellectual notion of despair over an irreconcilable loss. The loss of contact described in Cathay always finds expression

through a concrete and physical image. The bereaved protagonists in these poems find solace in the image of what they have lost; and they feel through this image so intensely that the contact with their beloved is never truly broken. The women still wait for their lovers; the poet still waits for his emperor; the friends still correspond over a thousand miles. In short, each poem documents a well-stretched strand of physical contact rooted in an original unity that gives its narrator strength to carry on in his painful autonomy. This amounts to a faith in physical reality as a condition for the recovery of lost unity; and this faith is ultimately centered in the earth as the original source of this physical reality. This faith is possible because none of the poems represents an environment for its protagonist that makes the protagonist the end of a series of deterministic actions. There is no wailing against the cruelty of an abstract destiny. The problems that exist define each person's emotions in a concrete way that leaves the way open for an equally concrete return to the origin. This is a sense of emotion that is at heart organic and life-oriented. In these poems, causality is the result of an internal rather than external organization of events. Things generate their own movements by harmonizing their life rhythms to the larger rhythms of more

comprehensive life processes. They are not propelled by a linear succession of determinative occurrences. Each of the Cathay poems expresses its natural position in the interrelatedness of events, each isolated variation being a different spoke emanating via its emotional autonomy from a central hub or source of unifying physical energy. Therefore the individual narrative force of each poem is necessary to the formation of the larger unity of the whole, a process based on an organic realism not at all alien to the major traditions of Chinese thought. For instance, in his article "Model of Causality in Chinese Thought" in Philosophy East and West, Chung-ying Cheng derives three principles that he believes can lead to a characterization of causality in Chinese thought:

There is, in the first place, a principle of holistic unity. By this I mean that all things in the world are unified as a whole through their being continuously generated from the same source or origin. One may also say that all things are generatively unified . . .

Second, there is the principle of internal life movements. By this I mean that all things in the world have an intrinsic life-force which moves them in a way in which motion is not imposed from other things or a God but is derived for the inexhaustible source of energy of life, which is the Way. As the source is intrinsically related to an individual thing, the derivation of energy for movement is intrinsic as in an organism rather

than extrinsic as in a machine. Similarly, as all things are interrelated to form a network of interchange of processes, the transmission of moving force is conceived of as an exhibition of life activity, in the absence of which the individual living things will cease to be defined.

Finally, there is the principle of organic balance. By this I mean that all things and processes in the world are related in processes which proceed towards a balance and a harmony. This does not mean that when a balance or a harmony is reached there cease to be processes of change and transformation . . . Because life is generated anew, the striving for balance and harmony on a new plane continues. That we must understand balance and harmony in a dynamic and actual sense is crucial.²⁴

The preceding cosmology provides a strong underpinning for a concrete poetry. The concept of things "continuously generated from the same source or origin" places the act of creativity within the world rather than outside of it. Furthermore, this creative agency is not separate from or of a different nature from that which is created. All things derive their "internal life movements" from the central creative act and can never lose their relationship with that act; moreover, each thing in existence expresses its own proportionate share of the creative energy through its own form. Since this "organic balance" is rooted in expressive action rising out of "the inexhaustible source of the energy of life," both the pattern a perceived event forms upon the senses and the pattern of symbols used to

communicate that event partake of the same central fund of expressive energy. Dualities such as matter and form certainly exist, but since they are constantly in interaction, there is no need to determine whether one of them is primary. This lack of interest in purely categorical distinctions has been one of the main reasons that abstraction for its own sake has never made much headway in China. In his book, A Short History of Chinese Philosophy, Yu-lan Fung, modern China's foremost intellectual historian, makes the following remark in the course of his exposition:

. . . we have seen that already in early times Kung-sun Lung made clear the distinction between universals and things . . . It would seem that he had some idea of the Platonic distinction of the two worlds, the eternal and the visible. The idea was not developed by later philosophers, however, and the philosophy of the School of Names did not become a main current in Chinese thought.²⁵

Rather than a conflict between the abstract and the concrete, most Chinese thought exhibits a dispersion of degrees of concreteness. As we have seen, this outlook is quite appropriate to the thematic organization of Ezra Pound's Cathay. It is the source for the faith in the basic relatedness of things that stands out in poem after poem in the original sequence.

III

Having confirmed the general correctness of Pound's approach to the translation of Cathay, we may now examine, with the help of some commentary, just how accurate Pound's musical intuition could be. And intuition was precisely what Pound was using. He had no knowledge of Chinese. All he had to work from were Fenollosa's notes for projected translations of a number of lyric poems and the guiding insight from "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" that there was a decisive relationship between a concrete and life-oriented view of the world highly conducive to successful poetry and a language written in "pictorial" ideograms. In order to build on this insight, though, Pound knew that he could not successfully parallel in English the type of activity that Fenollosa saw happening in the Chinese. Rather than make his ignorance obvious by attempting to write in "pictures" using intractably abstract Western characters,²⁶ he decided to use the concrete strength of his own language--precise and well-defined rhythm in sound. Pound was his usual straightforward self in describing the need for contact between Eastern ideogram and Western sound in a letter to Kitue Kitusano in 1940:

At any rate I need ideogram. I need it in and for my own job, but I also need sound and phonetics. Several half-wits in a state of half-education have sniffed at my going on with Fenollosa's use of the Japanese sounds for reading ideogram. I propose to continue. As sheer sound Dai Gaku is better than Ta Tsu. When it comes to the questions of transmitting from the East to the West, a great part of the Chinese sound is of no use at all. We don't hear parts of it, and the rest is a hiss or a mumble . . . Tones cannot be learnt at three thousand miles distance anyhow; or, at any rate, never have been.²⁷

He could hardly have been so sure in 1915, but he did realize the need to use the most concrete instrument at his command to make contact with the concrete Chinese ideograms. Through his facility with sound, Pound was able to pollinate the Chinese perception of process with his own perception of process; thus making Cathay, where it is most successful, a continuum of rhythmic perception. Alfred North Whitehead, who will play a large part in the next chapter's discussions, is quite articulate on the concrete contact that rhythm can effect with life:

This suggests a closer identification of rhythm as the causal counterpart of life; namely, that whenever there is some rhythm there is some life, only perceptible to us when the analogies are sufficiently close. The rhythm is then the life, in the sense in which it can be said to be included within nature . . . The essence of rhythm is the fusion of sameness and novelty; so that the whole never loses the essential unity of the pattern, while the parts exhibit the contrast arising from the novelty of their detail.²⁸

It is Whitehead's contention that although rhythm and life are obviously in contact on a large scale, such as the cycle of the seasons, the contact extends into smaller increments as well. It was Pound's genius to bring this truth into practice by synthesizing the feel for the concrete harmony and wholeness of nature shown by the Chinese language and philosophy with the variety and individual strength of rhythm carried by the spoken Western verse.

An excellent example of how Pound can bring this continuum of rhythmic perception into being can be found in the poem, "Lament of the Frontier Guard." (See Appendix, p. 187, for a full text of the poem.) As summarized earlier, the poem concerns the reflections of a guard at a lonely outpost. As he meditates upon the war that has caused his outcast state, these significant lines occur near the center of the poem:

Who has brought the army with drums and with
 kettle-drums?
 Barbarous kings.
 A gracious spring, turned to blood-ravenous autumn,
 A turmoil of wars-men, spread over the middle king-
 dom,
 Three hundred and sixty thousand,
 And sorrow, sorrow like rain.

(EPP, p. 133)

In order to fully appraise Pound's method here, it is instructive to follow Wai-lim Yip and present one of the original Chinese lines along with a correct literal

translation and the Fenollosa notes that Pound began with:

乃 和 氣 殺 氣

Literal: principle harmony change killing air
of yang,
active,
positive

Fenollosa: positive mild change kill gas
outside miasma
(= yo
principle of
spring
The mild clear principle turned into
poisonous vapor. Denotes the state
of people at the coming battle.)²⁹

The line that Pound draws out of this tentative accumulation of notes is "A gracious spring, turned to blood-ravenous autumn." From the standpoint of the Western rhythms of the translation, the first part of the line before the caesura is in delicate and "civilized" ascending rhythm. In the second part of the line, however, the rhythmic stress is reversed. "Turned to blood-ravenous autumn" is in descending rhythm colored with back-vowels that is in direct emotional conflict with the light sound and rhythm portrayed by the first section of the line. This pattern of conflict expressed through the verse rhythm is just as consistently developed in the more general descriptive activities of the poem as well. The images of conflicting human emotions combined with an image of abrupt change in season come together for Yip as an

amazingly accurate poetic rendering of the original Chinese:

For the word "autumn," which is neither in the original nor in Fenollosa's notes, is exactly the thing to which the "air of killing" refers, and, without Pound's knowing it, "blood-ravenous" is almost a perfect translation of the phrase (killing/air/soak/full) from which the phrase "killing air" in the original (Li Ki or The Book of Rites) is taken. We can, of course, call this an accident, but what a divine one! The important thing is, to be exact, that it allows the two planes of action--natural and human barbarity--to merge together, as is true of the original.³⁰

Pound's images are able to merge "two planes of action" because they accurately participate in the energy generated by the central process described and narrated by the poem, which is conflict. This central process is expressed by images that confirm the same concrete pattern of energy at different levels of generality. "Spring" and "autumn" are not simply metaphors for civilized or barbaric human behavior; they are concrete expansions of the energy that infuses the process in which both the humans and the seasons participate. In Pound's translation of this line from "Lament of the Frontier Guard," then, the initial conflict between rhythms appropriate to civilized and passionate feelings expands to an image of human decency versus human barbarity. These images of conflict reach their culmination in the

expansion of the central process to encompass the naturally conflicting characteristics of the seasons in a way harmonic with the original Chinese inspiration.

As translations, the poems of Cathay are, as a whole, rarely as accurate as the preceding example. In fact, many of the translations contain blatant and illiterate inaccuracies that unsympathetic commentators have been only too happy to enumerate.³¹ But, then, one of the most ingratiating aspects of Cathay is that one does not need to be a scholar of Chinese to gather pleasure and profit from its conjunction of rhythm and image. One has only to share Pound's desire to regain contact with a concrete and whole world. Those who can share this desire can understand D. B. Graham's sentiments: "Pound's method engages the reader's attention; the expository translation merely tells him what to feel. Literalism of the imagination, to alter slightly Marianne Moore's famous definition of poetry, seems to be what Pound is after."³²

In Cathay, Pound is able to use the image in a genuinely ambitious way. Fenollosa's vision of the Chinese ideogram and the concrete view of the world underlying that vision show Pound how to develop the relationships between images along a continuum of perception. Organized in this way, the images can narrate the formation of this continuum by expressing the different degrees of intensity and

extension of events that go into the making of the whole event. Such a narrative technique allows the entire environment active participation within it. Cities, rivers, seasons, earth and sky are all potential expressions of the poem's emotion. These elements of the environment are not the symbols of an abstract poetry; they are images of a concrete poetry. Pound makes clear that he has crossed his Rubicon with regard to the relative merits of symbol and image with this statement in his Gaudier-Brzeska:

Imagisme is not symbolism. The symbolist dealt in "association," that is, in a sort of allusion, almost of allegory. They degraded the symbol to the status of a word. They made it a form of metonymy. One can be grossly "symbolic," for example, by using the term "cross" to mean "trial." The symbolist's symbols have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2, and 7. The imagist's images have a variable significance, like the signs a, b, and x in algebra.³³

For Pound, symbolism seems a stopgap, a means of demonstrating the shallowness of standardized rhetoric, but with a decided capacity to become as fixed as any "official" vocabulary. In Pound's view, the image is the more appropriate device for narrating the perceptions that are the raw materials of his concretely poetic world. The image can register the rhythmic patterns of motion radiating from the centers of living things. Its continuity, therefore, is the continuity of living recurrence, not the continuity

of either familiar or enforced association. The image in Cathay documents a system of relationships that concretely exist, because everything in a concrete world is interconnected. This imagistic contact with the inherent motion of the of the living world in Cathay is evidence of a far more coordinated attempt at turning outward towards the emerging perception than Pound had achieved before. Up to the appearance of Cathay, Pound's successful use of the image as he envisioned it had been limited to occasional poems such as "In a Station of the Metro." In Cathay, however, Pound shows that he has the skill to see and narrate the relationships between a number of images. This ability to see living relationships is the talent that bears such vivid and intricate fruit in Hugh Selwyn Mauberley and, ultimately, in The Cantos.

NOTES

¹Donald Davie, Ezra Pound, Poet as Sculptor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 168-173.

²Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 145-146, 558-560.

³Hugh Witemeyer, The Poetry of Ezra Pound, 1908-1920 (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1969), p. 74.

⁴Ezra Pound, Literary Essays (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 277.

⁵For the most complete biographies of Fenollosa, see Van Wyck Brooks, Fenollosa and His Circle (New York: Dutton, 1962), and Lawrence Chisolm, Fenollosa, the Far East and American Culture (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963).

⁶Kenner, The Pound Era, pp. 197-198 offers the most authoritative version.

⁷Ernest Fenollosa, The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry, ed. Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1969), pp. 4-5.

⁸Fenollosa, pp. 25-26.

⁹Fenollosa, pp. 8-9.

¹⁰Achilles Fang, "Fenollosa and Pound," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, 20(1957), 222.

¹¹Pound, Literary Essays, pp. 123-137.

¹²Pound, Literary Essays, p. 92.

¹³Pound, Literary Essays, p. 107.

¹⁴Donald Davie, Articulate Energy, An Inquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), pp. 33-42.

¹⁵Fang, p. 220.

¹⁶Pound, Literary Essays, pp. 270-271.

¹⁷Pound, Literary Essays, p. 9.

¹⁸John W. White, The Verse of Greek Comedy (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), pp. i-xix. White offers some insights into a Nineteenth century philological controversy concerning the applicability of classical rhythms to modern verse. It was a controversy that could very well have been of some interest to Ezra Pound. At the turn of the Nineteenth century, the German scholars Apel and Voss attempted to defend Greek verse against charges that it was "rude and promiscuous" by showing its relevance to modern verse. In fact, as White describes Apel in his "Introduction": "He aimed to formulate a system of universal rhythm, and ominously announces in the preface of his big book that he intends to pay no attention to grammarians and "philologians" in his attempt to re-establish the true rhythms of verse--he will derive his conclusions directly from the poets, with whom in fact his acquaintance was inadequate" (p. xiv). The statement that White paraphrases from Apel does seem to be congenial with many of Pound's views, such as the importance of the primary poetic text, the unifying power of rhythm, and the distaste for pedantic philology. Although White does not agree with Apel's insights or theories, he has to admit that they are still influential at the beginning of the Twentieth century.

The formal term for the theory that White documents Apel as promulgating is the "logaoedic theory of Aeolic verse." The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger, et al. (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 460, defines "logaoedic" in the following way: "Term invented by metricians of Roman imperial times as a general description of mixed iambic and anapestic or dactylic and trochaic cola in Greek lyric verse." White mentions three classical scholars, von Christ, Goodell, and Shorey, who were publishing articles and monographs favoring the logaoedic theory immediately before and during

the time that Pound was attending college and graduate school. Although the evidence for direct influence is strictly circumstantial, it is still intriguing that Pound consistently uses a rhythm in Cathay with a hundred-year background of universal application. This coincidence is particularly interesting in that Pound's classical training was probably a factor in the formulation of the imagist theory that the poet's rhythms should be based on the musical phrase rather than the metronome.

¹⁹Davie, Ezra Pound, Poet as Sculptor, p. 41.

²⁰Ezra Pound, The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius (New York: New Directions, 1953), pp. 86-87.

²¹Wai-lim Yip, Ezra Pound's Cathay (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 111-113.

²²Yip, pp. 114-115.

²³Fang, p. 228. In his note 29 to the commentary on "South-Folk in Cold Country," Fang states, "Here ends the original, 1915, edition of Cathay. Pound, however, states: 'I have not come to the end of Ernest Fenollosa's notes by a long way, nor is it entirely perplexity that causes me to cease from translation....'"

²⁴Chung-ying Cheng, "Model of Causality in Chinese Thought, a Comparative Study," Philosophy East and West, 26(1976), 12. For a basic discussion of the relevance of Chinese thought for the West, see Joseph Needham, Science and Civilization in China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), II, 279-303. Here Needham gives his well-known thesis of an alternative tradition of organically oriented thought in Europe that seems to arise almost spontaneously with Leibniz's "Monadology" and culminates in the modern "philosophy of organism" of Whitehead. Needham offers some circumstantial accounts of how Leibniz might have felt the force of Chinese thought through contacts with Jesuit missionaries. Cheng, in the notes to his article, refers favorably to Needham's work.

²⁵Yu-lan Fung, A Short History of Chinese Philosophy, ed. Derk Bodde (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 284.

²⁶See Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era, pp. 289-298, for an account of Amy Lowell and Florence Ayscough, who in their Fir-Flower Tablets did not avoid this temptation.

²⁷Ezra Pound, The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1950), p. 347.

²⁸Alfred North Whitehead, An Enquiry into the Principles of Natural Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919), pp. 197-198.

²⁹Yip, pp. 95, 98.

³⁰Yip, p. 99.

³¹Pen-ti Lee and Donald Murray, "The Quality of Cathay: Ezra Pound's Early Translations of Chinese Poems," Literature East and West, 10(1966), 264-277. Lee and Murray stop short of saying that Pound should never have attempted Cathay. They do, however, call for an annotated edition that would point out the numerous errors and interpolations. No matter what side one takes in the controversy, though, the authors provide a very complete summary of the critical and scholarly work that has been done on Cathay.

³²D. B. Graham, "From Chinese to English: Ezra Pound's 'Separation on the River Kiang,'" Literature East and West, 13(1969), 190. The majority of this article is taken up with refuting Lee and Murray's arguments against this poem.

³³Ezra Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska, a Memoir (New York: New Directions, 1970), pp. 84-85.

CHAPTER THREE
STEVENS AND LIVING SPACE:
IMAGINATION AND REALITY
IN HARMONIUM

Unlike the flamboyant Pound, the personal and artistic life of Wallace Stevens was the model of propriety and decorum. He was an intensely private man, but this privacy was not the product of any ulterior motive. Rather, the poetry of Wallace Stevens is poetry generated from a high state of concentration--a concentration that could only be sustained by isolating himself from the influx of influences. The poetry of Stevens is through and through an act of individuation that conscientiously seeks to unify living processes with poetic processes.

Two major effects for Stevens' art seem to issue from this concern for individuality in expression. First of all, Stevens is able to maintain a very pure form of masculine assertiveness. His concern is with action, not reaction. Thus, he does not take pains to engage in the intellectually reductive game of proving that his originality is "more original" than someone else's.

Stevens is thereby able to reserve his assertiveness for his interaction with reality and avoid wasting it on attitudes toward reality, since these attitudes are necessarily removed from his main concern. This refusal to concern himself with his place in a hierarchy of artistic perception gives a fresh moral dimension to his creative assertiveness that has given traditional literary critics, most of whom are moralists at heart, a great deal of difficulty.

The second major effect of Stevens' focus upon individuation is that he has been able to positively examine the possibilities of general perception available to the modern man who is inextricably within the world. Given his unflagging assertiveness, Stevens does not view the modern decay of structures of meaning for reality to be a reason for lament or escapism. He views the so-called "predicament of modern man" as an opportunity, a stimulus for art. Stevens states his position unequivocally in his 1948 essay, "Effects of Analogy":

". . . there is enough and more than enough to do with what faces us and concerns us directly and that in poetry as an art, and, for that matter, in any art, the central problem is always the problem of reality."¹ Art, then, is a matter of "what concerns us directly," it is not an elaboration upon the given; for in the post-

Newtonian world, there is no "given." One has no ideal of objectivity from which to spin figurations of attitude upon a tabula rasa of absolute space. Space has come alive, and art must come alive in order to make contact with it. The human no longer has power over reality. He must meet it as an equal, as an immediate participant in its changes.

I

As stated before, Stevens' art moves the morality of art into a new dimension. By giving reality an actualizing power, Stevens puts the physical environment on the same moral footing as man. Most critics, though, involved as they are in ordering and labelling human endeavors, find the ecological implications of Stevens' careful assertions difficult to deal with, whether they are inclined to like Stevens' poetry or not. The most consistent and articulate of Stevens' detractors is Yvor Winters, whose statement is forthright and instructive enough to merit an extensive quotation:

The poem as an exercise in just feeling is an act of moral judgement, as I have repeatedly indicated; and though all such judgements must of necessity be governed by general principles, yet each particular judgement, since it arises from an individual relationship between

unique persons and events, will be, if truly just, unique, as individual men are unique, and will have its own inexhaustible fascination as a living entity. But if one does not recognize this principle of justice, then the poem can have no true uniqueness: the poet and reader alike are bent, as are Poe and Stevens, on a quest for the new, which, in the realm of emotion divorced from understanding or any principle of propriety, can be found only in new degrees of intensity and strangeness; and as each new degree achieved becomes familiar it is submerged in the monotone of that which is no longer new, so that the search is equally devoid of hope and of significance Stevens has the wit not only to see the futility but to be both depressed and ironic in consequence, yet he is unable to think himself out of the situation into which he has wandered.²

The influence of Dr. Samuel Johnson, both in prose style and critical approach, upon this passage is obvious; yet, the overtly Eighteenth century outlook is probably its greatest virtue. From this passage we can see, quite simply and honestly, that if one cannot speak of Stevens in Twentieth century terms then the only gentlemanly thing to do is dismiss him as amoral, futile, and obtuse. Even though Winters proffers a negative judgement on Stevens as wasted talent, he never strains a paraphrase and he never claims to know what Stevens is doing better than Stevens does. In its consistency, Winters' response to Stevens shows clearly how Stevens has thrown down the gauntlet to the standard literary conceptions of tradition and influence. For Stevens, the poem as an act of purely

human intellectual moral judgement is as out of place in the Twentieth century as knee-breeches and powdered wigs. But Stevens' enterprise cuts much deeper than a mere revelation that literary judgements like those of Winters are old-fashioned. Stevens' poetry attacks directly the carefully nurtured dualism of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries that maintained that a poet must either exercise the control of "principles" and "understanding" or give himself over to the control of "nature" and his emotions. To claim, as Winters does, that "his (Stevens') hedonism is so fused with Romanticism as to be merely an elegant variation on that somewhat inelegant System of Thoughtlessness"³ is not only to be incorrect, as I see it, but to reveal the difficulties that traditional literary terminology, steeped in the assumptions of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, must necessarily have with Stevens.

The most aggressive and coherent recent attempt to think Stevens out of the puzzle that Winters finds him in can be found in Harold Bloom's book on Stevens, The Poems of Our Climate. Bloom clearly realizes the difficulty that the old critical terminology has with Stevens, so he opts for the currently fashionable language of European structuralism spiced with psychoanalytic and rhetorical terminology. What Bloom cleverly does is replace the

tradition of literature as a variant expression of social and philosophical morality with a new tradition of literature as a variant of language itself. For Bloom the poet makes his artistic individuality out of an essential conflict with his medium, and this conflict forms the core of the American Romantic tradition from Emerson on that culminates in Stevens.⁴

Bloom's approach employs two central innovations. First of all, by focusing upon the basically revolutionary and positive outlook of America, he is able to avoid the passive European emphasis on the "foregrounding" of artistic language based upon a "figuration of doubt" aimed at the norms of language. Bloom states, in a completely American and democratic manner, that such a linguistic norm does not exist; thus the poetry of strength, in particular the American Romantic, creates poetry through the agency of his will: "Misprison is the process by which the meanings of intentionality trope down to the mere significance of language, or conversely the process by which the significations of language can be transformed or troped upward into the meaningful world of our Will-to-Power time and its henchman, language."⁵ One does not need social or philosophical continuity to maintain a tradition. One can discover, instead, a tradition of individual will

over language. Such a tradition, though, is not diachronic, but synchronic, thus paving the way for Bloom's concern for the "intertextuality" of poets involved in bringing this will to fruition, no matter what the historical date of their composition. Bloom is thereby able to fashion a tradition unbound by the temporality of human events. Instead his approach is based upon the inherent uniqueness of the American experience and the past century's discovery of the power of the unique human personality manifested through the will.

The second particular innovation of Bloom's method has to do with the mechanism that he uses to apply his general theories to individual poems. Bloom is always on the look-out for what he terms "crossings" in the text of the poem,

I use "crossing" arbitrarily but precisely for the negative moments that collect meaning in the post-Romantic crisis-poem, insofar as meaning is present within a single text rather than wandering around between texts. But meaning also wanders around within a text, and its location by crossings ought to provide a perspective for interpretation that we haven't had before, a more certain link between rhetoric and psychology than my own ventures into identifying tropes and defenses.⁶

The negative moments that Bloom mentions are the "places

where the rhetoric is most disjunctive."⁷ Thus Bloom makes a virtue of the obscurity that Yvor Winters finds so damning. He summarizes this rhetorical psychology by analyzing Stevens' early poem "Domination of Black." (See Appendix, p. 188, for a full text of the poem.) He identifies in that poem three "crossings": the Crossing of Election, the Crossing of Solipsism, and the Crossing of Identification. In his analysis of these three "crossings" it becomes obvious why he needs the virtue of obscurity, for the three "crossings" occur in a purely subjective mental state, and each distinctive point that Bloom discovers is a movement away from reality. Bloom seems to see Stevens playing a game of psychological hide-and-seek with reality. In the Crossing of Election, a term no doubt cleverly borrowed from the Puritan tradition of meditation and self-examination, Bloom sees Stevens meeting "the fear that he may not be able to become a poet or to maintain his own poethood."⁸ Next, "in the midst of the longer second stanza, Stevens negotiates the Crossing of Solipsism, finding his way past his constant temptation to know both the exteranlity of nature and the existence of other selves only as irreality."⁹ Finally, "the Crossing of Identification comes in the third stanza, between 'I saw how the planets gathered/ Like the leaves themselves/ Turning in the wind' and 'I saw how the night came,' with

its introjections of mortality A Crossing of Identification defensively tropes against death and also tropes towards it, confirming the ambivalence of Freud's hypothetical yet Romantically based 'death instinct.'¹⁰ Having passed through this final "crossing," the poem now is able to achieve, by means of the line "Came striding like the color of the heavy hemlocks," what he calls "a metalyptic reversal, raising the poem's final line to an almost apocalyptic pitch of rhetoricity, of excessive word-consciousness (a text's equivalent of human self-consciousness)."¹¹

This fairly long summary has been necessary to demonstrate, in an admittedly skeletal manner, how Bloom attempts to show the rhetorical development of the poem as analogous to the development of an autonomous human consciousness. The analysis, though, is not so much a justification of the poem, but a justification of the reality of human subjectivity. His account of the increasing "rhetoricity" of the poem takes the form of a process of abstraction away from reality which ends in a "Crossing of Identification," with the "I" thus identified completely removed from contact with his perceptions. For Bloom, life outside of the human personality is ultimately a death-dealing reality. And for a poem to be in any way ultimate itself, it must react

against the dangerous instinct to contact reality and absorb the death that it contains. Bloom's notion of Stevens' act of individuation is an essentially negative one. If a poet cannot imitate general nature the way that Yvor Winters would have it imitated, then that poet must battle against nature and existentially assert his difference from it. As surely as Satre's contention that we can never make contact with nature derives from Kant's ding und sich, then, according to Bloom, Stevens is the modern exponent of Coleridge's "eternal I Am." Finally, Bloom, for all his complexity and coherence, is still partaking of the dualistic terminology of Winters' criticism, proposing solipsism as the answer to enforced conformity. His readings do not take Stevens' care for and knowledge about his own creative assertions into reality enough into account.

Wallace Stevens' poetry is a poetry of wholeness, not a poetry of proposed intellectual wholeness, but a poetry of a perceptual wholeness that is a ground from which the poet abstracts his particular poetic acts. This concern with perceptual wholeness necessarily requires that Stevens' poetry be a participation with reality, and assert value in that participation. The respective critical languages of moral judgement and rhetorical analysis are not unamenable to Stevens' enterprise, but

each tends to emphasize only one-half of the full relation with reality that Stevens is concerned with. That is, both Stevens' morality and his rhetoric attempt to reach out for and include reality, not retract from it. For Stevens, the human being is a part of life and its continual creative activity, a living part of a living space. In such a living space, relations are primary and concrete, and individual manifestations of this relational energy derive from the change constantly going on. As stated earlier, Stevens' poetry is not poetry that compares attitudes towards reality. It is a poetry about the value inherent in the contact with reality, and this value is couched in the activity of life. Unless we can view Stevens in this holistic way, his poetry is doomed to be either much ado about nothing at the expense of human morality or a desperate ado about himself at the expense of the rest of reality.

In order to view Stevens holistically, though, it is necessary to take him seriously, to assume that he knows what he is talking about both in his poetry and in his statements about poetry. It is the current fashion in Stevens criticism to view his poetry as a Delphic Oracle of modern ambiguities in which everyone can offer his own interpretation without fear of a decisive refutation. This is not necessarily bad, since such a view implies

that Stevens' work offers a wealth of possibilities to the mind, which indeed it does. However, the cornerstone of this approach has been to dismiss Stevens' critical writings almost entirely in order to keep the interpretative field as wide open as possible. Joseph N. Riddel, in his book, The Clairvoyant Eye, sums up the general opinion: "Unlike Eliot's or even James' essays, Stevens' provide but few valid reflections on the essential nature of the artist's practice, or on the cultural phenomenon of his art."¹² In fact, Stevens does make numerous valid insights concerning the "essential nature of the artist's practice, and the cultural phenomenon of his art."

However, Stevens has the sense to realize that traditional literary terminology is not modern or inclusive enough to speak accurately about the type of art that he envisions. In his concern for wholes, Stevens naturally prefers more general terminology than usually appears in aesthetic theory, and for his trouble he is accused of question-begging.¹³ Yet his seemingly arbitrary statements such as "His (the poet's) role, in short, is to help people to live their lives,"¹⁴ reveal a primary concern with the ability of art to get at the assumptions that guard the boundaries of our sentient lives, and whose limitations are the source of the painfully inexpressible confusions that haunt the always incomplete human mind at

every epoch. Stevens believes that if it is approached precisely and intensely enough, there is an implicit value in the perceptions' contact with reality, and that contact will reveal how truly alive reality is:

The poet has his own meaning for reality, and the painter has, and the musician has; and besides what it means to the intelligence and to the senses, it means something to everyone, so to speak The subject matter of poetry is not that "collection of solid, static objects extended in space" but the life that is lived in the scene that it composes; and so reality is not that external scene but the life that is lived in it. Reality is things as they are.¹⁵

The fact is, "things as they are," the ancient question of being, is all the more difficult because of its seeming obviousness, its seeming static givenness. Thus we can see from the evidence of Stevens' own words that his so-called obscurity is not a defensive obscurity, but an "offensive" obscurity, attending to the difficult rigor of attuning the perceptions to a participation with the energy and life of reality by narrating its "violence."¹⁶ An insistence upon the violence of reality is an insistence upon its difficulty and its challenge. Such a challenge cannot be met by merely and passively measuring one's distance, for this implies that dangerous reality has somehow been domesticated, and that one may view it like a tiger in a cage. To maintain the living energy of

reality in his poetic approach, and thus to attempt an even greater accuracy than objectivity with its convenient fictions of "solid, static objects" can ever attain, Stevens must always be a narrator, and each of his poems exhibits a process.

To reiterate, Stevens' poems are difficult to paraphrase, not because of their distance from actual experience, but because of their immediacy with experience. Therefore, any terminology that is applied to them must be a terminology of activity, not stasis. Fortunately, such a terminology exists in the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Even though there is ample evidence that Stevens read Whitehead with appreciation and approval,¹⁷ there is no claim being made here for direct influence. Instead, we should note that a paraphrase necessarily takes the form of prose, and the prose strategies employed by Whitehead in his descriptions of physical process are particularly applicable to a prose exegesis of Stevens' poems. As an illustration of the congeniality of Whitehead's method with that of Stevens' poetics, we should consult one of Whitehead's central statements in his Enquiry into the Principles of Natural Knowledge, published in 1919,

The conception of knowledge as passive contemplation is too inadequate to meet the facts. Nature is ever originating its own development, and the sense of action is the direct knowledge of the percipient event

as having its very being in the formation of natural relations. Knowledge issues from this reciprocal insistence between this event and the rest of nature, namely relations are perceived in the making and because of the making. For this reason perception is always at the utmost point of creation This passage of nature--or, in other words, its creative advance--is its fundamental characteristic; the traditional concept is an attempt to catch nature without its passage.¹⁸

Whitehead is attempting to express the possibility of describing the activity of nature from within, an attempt made necessary by his awareness that there is no escape from the dynamics of change. Whitehead's method is born of the fact that we see whole first and proceed to finer discriminations as they are occurring within that perception. What anyone can actually see in any situation is what is primary:

For natural philosophy everything perceived is within nature. We may not pick and choose. For us the red glow of the sunset should be as much a part of nature as are the molecules and electric waves by which men of science would explain the phenomenon. It is for natural philosophy to analyze how these various elements of nature are connected.

In making this demand I conceive myself as adopting our immediate instinctive attitude toward perceptual knowledge which is only abandoned under the influence of theory.

. . . Natural philosophy should never ask, what is in mind and what is in nature. To do so is a confession that it has failed to express relations

between things perceptively known,
namely to express those natural
relations whose expression is natural
philosophy.¹⁹

The most telling immediate implication of this approach is the insistence that all perception occurs in the midst and by means of relations. Within such a system of relations there must be inherent limits to extensive expansion and contraction. Infinite space and a point in isolation cannot really exist. Thus what we perceive is never complete or discrete, but manifests itself as bits of process within a larger pattern of process. These bits of process are what Whitehead calls events and are the concretely related wholes that we initially perceive. Since the whole perception is what is primary, we always arrive at some degree of precision in our perception by what he calls a "route of approximation."²⁰ Any description, then, is always within this whole of changing relations and must take this element of change into account. Whitehead's method of natural philosophy can never describe by means of a detached, uninvolved observer. It must narrate the inherent changes from within that change. Whitehead's philosophy is a philosophy based upon the world in inherent action, literally the "actual" world. Because of his concern with "wholes in action" Whitehead focuses a great deal of attention upon showing that the interrelated wholeness of events is part of inter-

related and intrinsic wholeness of life. Life, for Whitehead, is naturally creative and occurs wherever processes inform events. This vision of process expands the scope and power of life beyond the boundaries of protoplasm into the extended field of relationships formerly known as space. Whitehead's "philosophy of organism" is his study of how organisms individuate themselves as actual events against the larger "extensive continuum" of living relationships.

If we refer back to the preceding analysis of "The Snow Man" in the first chapter, the proper parallels between Whitehead's outlook and Stevens' poetic method become more apparent. The "mind of winter" is synthesized within the concrete environment rather than conceived in isolation from it; thus it sees "nothing that is not there." The poem narrates a whole perception, an event. But what can we say is Stevens' perceptual basis for the creation of his poetic wholes? To get an explicit statement from him on this point, we need to consult his essay of 1948, "Imagination as Value":

It is as if one could say that the imagination lives as the mind lives. The primitivism disappears. The Platonic resolution of diversity appears. The world is no longer an extraneous object, full of other extraneous objects, but an image. In the last analysis, it is with this image of the world that we are vitally concerned.²¹

If we are willing to take Stevens' explicit theory seriously, it is not too difficult to note that his view of the image is not that much different from Whitehead's view of the event. This parallelism is particularly illuminating if we remember that even in its conventional literary usage, the image can successfully mediate between the mind and reality in that its content can be projected as a purely mental phenomenon or realized empirically in reality. As Stevens sees it, the image is certainly a whole, a "resolution of diversity." Or to put it in Whiteheadian terms, the image is an organic system of relations with inherent change and action. Now, if we state this activity of the image in more poetic terms, the image is a central relationship within a poem that actualizes the character of the poem's general relationship to reality and provides a unit of process with which to appreciate that particular poem's process of growth towards expressing a portion of the larger reality within which it is occurring. Stevens' poetry, when it successfully utilizes images, partakes of the energies of the concrete world. Because, as a function of the imagination, it is a part of the "image of the world"; and, as such, it is stationed with the living activity of the physical world, participating in its changes. Stevens' poetry cannot be

opposed to the physical realities of the world, since it narrates processes within living systems.

II

Of course, to truly appreciate this radical activity of Stevens' poetry, it is necessary to turn to the poems themselves. We will turn specifically to the poems of Harmonium, his first book, initially published in 1923. As befits a first book of poems, albeit a late one (Stevens was past forty years of age.), its images are audaciously physical. They reveal, not without touches of irony and ambivalence, a variety of ways in which perceptions can be interconnected by the imagination. Much of the magic in these poems consists in how they are able to assert this interconnection through the very physicality of their images. This magic is not achieved without effort, however. Several of the poems document an honest fear of breaking out of the comforting shadows of introspection. An appropriate way to approach Harmonium, perhaps, is to study how the act of perception in a number of the poems moves into contact with reality and acclimates itself to the possibilities and limitations of a holistic vision.

An instructive poem to begin with is the poem that Harold Bloom accurately terms "ambivalent,"²² "Domination of Black." The ambivalence in this poem, though, is not the psychological ambivalence that Bloom speaks of. It is, rather, an ambivalence towards the power of living reality as Stevens discovers its true extent. At the crux of the conflicts in the poem is the conflict between image and symbol. As the Egyptian god of Socrates' anecdote has already stated, the symbol is intimately associated with the activity of memory. But, as the symbolists of the Nineteenth century discovered, symbols do not have to follow "normal" sequences within the mind. They found that they could create and confirm a "state of mind" independent of the limitations of societally accepted reality by generating original and unusual sequences of symbols. Prosaically stated, this seems a bit far-fetched; but many of the symbolists, and particularly Mallarme, seem to have enjoyed the atmosphere of elite and mystical poetic power over reality that went along with such theorizing.

However, as Hugh Kenner concretely points out in The Pound Era, our ability to appreciate the "symbolism" in Shakespeare's famous poem from Cymbeline is not damaged by the fact that "Golden lads and girls all must/
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust" refers not to humans,

but to the dandelion in bloom and as a ball of spores respectively.²³ For this reason, trying to trace "the influence of symbolism" is a difficult business: one is simply attempting to trace a phenomenon of words that the symbolists just institutionalized.²⁴ However, insofar as symbolism can serve to associate memories within the reflecting mind, then the use of symbolism in "Domination of Black" is significant.

The poem begins with a reverie based upon the resemblance of the colors of the leaves outside to the colors generated by the fire in the room where the speaker is sitting. The comparison is not static, though, because the central word in the opening passage is a verb, "turning." This verb expresses three different kinds of movement: the "turning" of the leaves as they blow outside, the "turning" of the leaves as they change color, and the "turning" of the leaves as the speaker associates them with the changing colors of the fire. This passage's movement is outwardly as well as inwardly directed. It therefore manifests the "bridge-building" power of the image to draw a connection between the traditional psychological duality of an "outside" and an "inside." This dynamically varied and imagistically positive movement for the perception is confirmed and summarized in the "yes" of the eighth line.

In the concluding three lines of the first stanza, however, there is an abrupt change in direction for the perceptions in the poem: "but the color of the heavy hemlocks/ Came striding./ And I remembered the cry of the peacocks" (CP, p. 8). With these three lines, the active images of the first eight lines of the stanza transform into the associative symbols of memory. This transformation moves the action of the poem into the domain of the reflective powers of the introspective mind and away from perceptions of the physical world. The kernel of action, the verb, in these three lines is the precisely linear "striding," a verb that can only be symbolically, rather than perceptually, associated with the "color of the heavy hemlocks." The "color of the heavy hemlocks" is itself a symbol, carrying its own historical implications of death as the instrument of Socrates' enforced suicide. This complex of mental association is made explicit in the final line of the stanza, "and I remembered the cry of the peacocks." To remember the peacocks' "cry" rather than their colors comes from a conscious effort of mental association rather than imagistic perception.

The second stanza of the poem begins to reverse this movement somewhat by projecting the mental symbols

as though they are physical perceptions. The mental peacocks and hemlocks are presented as though they are physically real and in direct conflict with the vividly perceptual "turning": "I heard them cry--the peacocks./ Was it a cry against the twilight/ Or against the leaves themselves" (CP, p. 9). The image of "turning," though, literally "turns" the direction of the speaker's perception back toward the concrete, the physical. Four of the five objects of the verb "turn" in the anaphoric sequence of phrases it initiates in the second section of the poem are concrete objects. This move outward, away from the mind and its private associations, is only tentative, since the possibility that the peacocks' cry might be "against the hemlocks?" appears as a questioning afterthought.

The inclusive and therefore potentially actualizing perceptual image of "turning" reasserts itself in an even stronger manner in the third section of the poem: "Out of the window,/ I saw how the planets gathered/ Like the leaves themselves/ Turning in the wind." In this image, the most successful one in the poem, the power of the image to mate the expansiveness of human creativity with the limits of reality is clearly invoked. The action of "turning" connects the grand movements of the planets with the intimate images of immediate leaves and fire. This holistic vision is short-lived, however. The speaker

returns in the next line to his own private mental associations with an honest interjection of fear at the potential of his vision: "I saw how the night came,/ Came striding like the color of the heavy hemlocks/ I felt afraid./ And I remembered the cry of the peacocks."

The "crisis" in "Domination of Black" is not so much a crisis of personal creative confidence as a crisis of perceptual direction. The poem reveals the potential power of outer-directed images, but counters this power with a system of inner-directed symbols based upon the purely mental operations of the memory. The poem is so concerned with the intellectual decision between the inner and the outer that it can only find completion in the intellectual ambivalence of compromise. It is a poem of parts that attempt to structure a whole, but the process of synthesis attempted is too black and white; it is caught in a fearful dialectic from which is no escape. This fearful dialectic, though, helps to point out the difficulties that the proclivity towards self-examination that meditative modes of poetry present for a poet such as Stevens. "Domination of Black" reveals a reality perceived as essentially alien and intimidating. This conception of reality puts the systematizing power of the mind onto the defensive, reinforcing a dualism of mind and world. This is a view of the world with which Stevens could not be comfortable for very long.

"Domination of Black," though, does set forth Stevens' poetic problem in stark terms. As he was to put it much later in his creative career, "in poetry as an art . . . the central problem is always the problem of reality."²⁵ One of Stevens' major steps towards the solution of this problem is to assert a systematic method of contacting reality through contact with the processes of reality. That is, he attempts to perceive reality through a living space, a space that presents a process that can be comprehended through perception of its concrete system. He can, by using this method, make the inherent limits of a world based upon events work for him so that perception of these events through images can take place within what are ultimately internal relationships.

Stevens' most widely acclaimed account of establishing a creative relationship between world and self within a larger field of living space is his relatively early poem, "Sunday Morning." Certainly it is the easiest of the Harmonium poems to understand in a traditional literary sense because of its majestic and expansive rhythm and diction; and for these traits it has been justly praised. The poem also has a major theme suitable for extraction. This theme is the gracious acceptance of the death of God, the isolation of modern man, and the inevitability of death.

It is true that in "Sunday Morning" the power of reality is definitely associated with the power of death. However, in "Sunday Morning" Stevens makes the major step of subsuming death within change, the same kind of positive change contained in the image of "turning" in "Domination of Black."

"Sunday Morning" is able to partake of the fruits of accessibility because its emotional content, particularly in its opening, seems to be understandable in terms of traditional narrative forms and intellectual conflicts. A woman, concerned about her attitude toward traditional religious beliefs, debates with herself whether the vitality of change or the bliss of transcendence is preferable. The key term here in assessing the poem's accessibility is "attitude." This term implies that the woman has some measurable perspective upon the tradition. This way be where the poem begins, but it is not where the poem ends; for there are two other voices in the poem, and without them the poem cannot achieve its wholeness.

The first, and most extensive, of these voices is the voice of description that begins the poem; the second of these voices is the voice of mystery that ends the poem. It is the voice of description with which we must be primarily concerned for the moment, though. It is important to note that the poem does not begin with any

intellectual assertions, but with a visual image that gradually merges into a psychological environment, the woman's dream. The key word in this transition from outer to inner reality is the word "sacrifice." In combination with the adjectives "holy" and "ancient," such a term comes laden with a tremendous accumulation of inherent symbolic association. This symbol naturally exerts its power through the inner faculties of dream and memory. This is not an ordinary symbol, however. It is a primal symbol, one that renews the challenge laid down in "Domination of Black" in a particularly strong and eloquent way. In "Sunday Morning," though, the image and its externalizing power are equal to the challenge in that the image is able to establish its own narrative power separate from the quandary of the woman's internal dialogue and make an expansive and accurate creative step outward into the world of relationships.

This liberating activity does not begin until the third section of the poem. Rather, the narrative is at work in the first two stanzas, but it is inhibited by the fact that it is working in close conjunction with the woman's intellectual problem: "The day is like wide water, without sound,/ Stilled for the passage of her dreaming feet" (CP, p. 67). And in the second stanza, "Divinity must live within herself" (CP, p. 67). In both of these

stanzas the woman claims the images of the elements of the earth for herself, yoking them into her argument. Here, rightfully, is the pantheism and hedonism that Yvor Winters is concerned with. The woman feels that she can argue for one kind of experience against another and make a choice. In the third stanza, though, the narrative moves out of the woman's mind into the larger world of myth. The relationship being described starts to generalize away from the woman's internal dialogue into a larger, communal context in which the "inhuman" Jove brings the "mythy" powers of the sky to earth: "He moved among us, as a muttering king,/ Magnificent, would move among his hinds,/ Until our blood, commingling, virginal,/ With heaven, brought such requital to desire/ The very hinds discerned it, in a star" (CP, pp. 67-68). In this passage reality begins to work its way out of the straight-jacket of symbol and into the activity of image. The "blood, commingling" is a physical rendering of the lusty interaction between heaven and earth that Jove enacts with his human lovers in animal form. Thus the "star" is a physical perception, a concrete realization of an ongoing process, not just a symbol. By the end of this stanza, the speculation can be put forth that if "the earth/ Seem all of the paradise that we shall know," then "The sky will be much friendlier then than now,/

A part of labor and a part of pain . . . / Not this
dividing and indifferent blue" (CP, p. 68).

By the next section the distinction between the woman's concerns and the force of the description is explicitly apparent in that the dialogue is no longer internal. The energy of narrative is now moving toward the external as the woman asks her rhetorical question in quotes that separate her query from the now primarily descriptive mode of the poem, which is now gaining momentum and dominance. In stanza IV, the woman's question takes up some five lines, and she gets a direct reply. The reply is that no "haunt of prophecy" or "old chimera of the grave . . . that has endured/ As April's green endures; or will endure/ Life her remembrance of awakened birds,/ Or June and evening, tipped/ By the consummation of the swallow's wings" (CP, p. 68). In this reply, the concreteness of the woman's desire and the colors of spring are given a greater chance of endurance than the abstract symbols of eternity. The woman, though, has now receded into the third person and the section ends with the image, "tipped by the consummation of swallow's wings." We last hear from the woman as she confirms the inevitable dialectic of the internal stance by arbitrarily reversing her outlook: "But in contentment I still feel/ The need of some imperishable bliss" (CP, p. 68). The reply she

receives is the famous dictum, "Death is the mother of beauty" (CP, p. 68). The rest of stanza V and all of stanza VI work imagistic variations upon the power and necessity of change, and by this insistence upon the concrete, gradually transforms the argument into a vision of heaven unreceptive to the concreteness of change.

By stanza VII, the intellectual argument is entirely replaced by a pure vision of a pagan ceremony in which the strong connective images of stanza III, particularly the blood whose flow unites earth and sky, return. The sun-god that the pagans worship is immanent, a concrete power within their midst, an element of pure concretion. The "wide water, without sound" that the lady treads upon in her dream is now energized by this immanent force into "The windy lake wherein their lord delights" (CP, p. 70). The power of the image is the power of immanence. It documents a world of relationships internally organized, yet public and sensory. This movement of divinity and its power of organization into the world requires that the poetic vision break out of the essentially private world of private attitudes carried by a memory fueled on symbols and their associations. The image is out in the open: "And whence they shall come and whither they shall go/ The dew upon their feet shall manifest" (CP, p. 70). The truth of the event taking its own shape is an image that has broken free

to tell its own story, make its own manifestation of change.

Reality as a whole now has its own voice, the mysterious third voice of the poem that, as the third vertex of the triangle, confirms the existence of the whole: "She hears, upon that water without sound,/ A voice that cries, 'The tomb in Palestine/ Is not the porch of spirits lingering./ It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay'" (CP, p. 70). The mystery has been transformed. It is not now the mystery of vague, unverifiable presentiments. It is a truer mystery, the mystery of the concrete, the whole event--the uncompromising fact of process that defies human abstractions. This is not a disembodied truth. The water image has now overcome the symbols to become the "inescapable" environment of change. In the last three lines the horizon becomes the edge of reality; and in the image of the birds at the edge of living space, the horizon as the concrete infinity point marks the inevitable conjunction between the duality of earth and sky--the mystic third point that enfolds life into a interconnected process. Each perception is a new center of change in such a world. Each perception partakes of the process of broadening or limiting its scope of interactions. As such, its story is not a story of measurement from the outside, but an actualization of intensity or expansion focused upon a center.

"Sunday Morning" is a great transitional poem, but it is not a particularly concentrated one. It is deliberately expansive in the way it repeats and elaborates; but this very broadness of approach is what makes it difficult to build upon. For "concentration" makes a good shorthand term for what the poem achieves in spite of its rhetorical gesturing. Stevens did have one more great poem left in him that exhibited this manner, "The Comedian as the Letter C." But it is a special case that we will examine in detail in the next chapter. Primarily, though, in order to work with the image liberated in "Sunday Morning," Stevens had to experiment with different ways to "concentrate" upon images in order to give them the most power to show themselves living in relation to other living events.

A traditional form for concentration in the history of poetry has been the meditative poem. In his ironic piece "Frogs Eat Butterflies. Snakes Eat Frogs. Hogs Eat Snakes. Men Eat Hogs," Stevens somewhat humorously turns some of the traditional methods of meditative poetry upon a natural process:

Frogs Eat Butterflies. Snakes Eat
Frogs. Hogs Eat Snakes.
Men Eat Hogs.

It is true that the rivers went nosing like swine,
Tugging at banks, until they seemed
Bland belly-sounds in somnolent troughs,

That the air was heavy with the breath of these swine,
 The breath of turgid summer, and
 Heavy with thunder's rattapallax,

That the man who erected this cabin, planted
 This field, and tended it awhile,
 Knew not the quirks of imagery,

That the hours of his indolent, arid days,
 Grotesque with this nosing in banks,
 This somnolence and rattapallax,

Seemed to suckle themselves on his arid being,
 As the swine-like rivers suckled themselves
 While they went seaward to the sea-mouths.
 (CP, p. 78)

The poem's story can be briefly summarized in terms of process. The title is a doggerel based upon the food chain that in turn establishes "swine" as the central conceit of the poem. The poem places human perception and activity within reality's cyclic process. The process enacted by the poem does not exalt the human activity, however. Instead, the conceit of the "swine-like rivers" "nosing in banks" (CP, p. 78) illustrates a process of cutting into the earth that draws "the man who erected this cabin, planted/ this field and tended it awhile" (CP, p. 78) inextricably into a moving and unavoidably physical process. The man "Knew not the quirks of imagery" (CP, p. 78). He is absorbed into a process and drawn into the unity of the sea with the rest of the silt. Instead of exalting the human powers with his "metaphysical conceit," Stevens ironically roots him in the earth as a part of its more

comprehensive logic. This logic, however, is not so much a logos, or a word made flesh. It is, rather "the flesh made word." Stevens is humorously turning the method of meditative poetry back on itself. In his essay, "John Donne: A Valediction," one of his series of important essays of the art of meditative poetry, Louis L. Martz gives the following definition of meditative poetry:

But can we ever give a satisfying and precise definition of meditative poetry? We might begin by saying that meditative poetry displays an actor who, first of all, seeks himself in himself; but not because he is self-centered in our sense of that term--no, he seeks himself in order to discover or construct a firm position from which he can include the universe.²⁶

In a succeeding essay, "Meditative Action and 'The Metaphysik Style,'" Martz goes on to propose that the concern for control necessary to "construct a firm position from which he can include the universe" was an important factor in the development of the ingenious and concentrated conceits of the so-called "metaphysical poetry" that "showed a tendency to coalesce and concentrate its powers towards the sharp illumination and control of carefully selected moments in experience."²⁷ In "Frogs Eat Butterflies" the elements of concentration and control in expression clearly exist, but the conceit's consistency is the consistency of the gross powers and processes of

the earth that enfold and sweep the ignorant man along. Stevens has turned his meditative powers away from himself and out of the world, convoluting the meditative process by applying its precision of method but reversing its direction. What has traditionally been a narrative of internal composition becomes a narrative of external composition.

The picture of reality that starts to emerge from a poem like "Frogs Eat Butterflies" is not an alien and arbitrary one at all. It is a picture of nature as a unifying "ground" that offers unity through immediate experience of its motions. Isolated from this basic experience, humans tend to rely on increasingly similar conventions that can permeate even their dreams. In the short poem "Disillusionment at Ten O'Clock," for instance,

The houses are haunted
By white night-gowns.
None are green,
Or purple with green rings,
Or green with yellow rings,
Or yellow with blue rings.
(CP, p. 66)

Even the ghosts are conventional.

People are not going
To dream of baboons and periwinkles.
Only, here and there, an old sailor,
Drunk and asleep in his boots,
Catches tigers
In red weather.
(CP, p. 66)

The truly singular dream can only come from "an old sailor,/ Drunk and asleep in his boots," one who has not mounted a mattress to escape reality, but in his unself-conscious comfort within reality has the power of original imagination derived from uninhibited concentration.

The more Harmonium poems one surveys, the more evident it becomes that Stevens' poetic act of individuation is not an act against the external world, but an act of imagination derived from the inherent relatedness of reality. In such a creative environment, the poetic image works best as a concrete whole event that can give internal form to a more extended and potentially less distinguished event. The image used in this way partakes of the grounding power of concrete and immediate reality. A working example of this imagistic power is the poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." (See Appendix, p. 191, for a complete text of this poem.) In this poem the overwhelming and arbitrary expanse of reality as "Black" portrayed in "Domination of Black" has been refined and individualized into the "Blackbird." The blackbird image injects reality into the perception; it is the concentrated pattern of inherent action that moves from perception to perception, concretely unifying the disparate conventions of observation.

The "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" can be divided into four general categories of perceptions. First and last in the sequence of images come the simple perceptions of landscape. In the starkest of these, which are, interestingly enough, numbers I and XIII, the opening and closing images of the poem, the blackbird provides the essential contrast or change that gives life to the landscape. This is living narration at its most primary, a perception of a unit of change within a static scene. Framed within these primal boundaries of perception, though, are other, more energetic, kinds of perception. The second kind of perception that we might note is the significant perception of landscape, in which perceptions of the processes of the concrete world are illustrated by meaningful abstractions. These abstractions take the form of dramatic meaning (III), causal meaning (VI), geometric meaning (IX), and fantastic and perverse meaning (X). In each one of these segments the blackbird's actions are "evidence" for the unity of the scene described.

But the blackbird image is not only injected into the landscape, it is injected into human activities as well, both in the singular and in the plural. In each of these instances within the poem (IV, VII, and XI), the blackbird image is a reminder of the presence of a reality that underlies human enterprises and pretensions. The

intensity of this reminder ranges from simple completion (IV) to a fear of death that "pierces" through smug and artificial contentment (XI). The final and most intimate perception that the blackbird image energizes is the first person perception. In the first two of these perceptions, numbers II and V, the blackbird image provides the speaker with a concrete way to illustrate a highly abstract and diluted observation about himself. The blackbird offers an escape from the mannered inaccuracies of self-concern into the precision of immediately perceived physical reality. In number VIII, which is the most intimate perception of the thirteen and therefore, in Whiteheadian terms, the most honestly general:

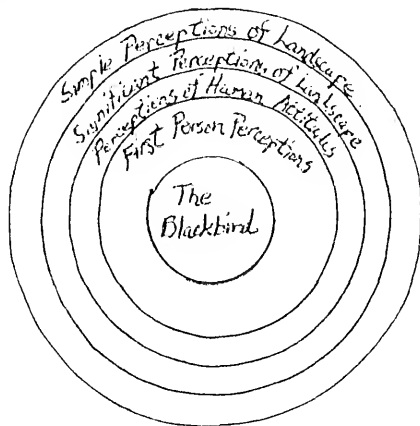
I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

(CP, p. 94)

The movement of the actual "accents" and "rhythms" have a functioning noble strength and a lucid rhythm and therefore participate in what they describe, actively unifying example and general statement. The blackbird, as the agent of reality, is certainly involved in this segment of the poem as an image of knowledge grounded in participation. But the most important implication of the blackbird image here is that it keeps the perception aimed outward. The first person perception can intensify and

generalize its relationship with reality without falling back into subjectivity.

The four categories of perception isolated in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" can be arranged in four concentric circles from most expansive to most intimate and immediate:



All of the circles are centered by the blackbird image, making the blackbird image an actualizing power within all the different levels of perception. The image draws all of these "levels" of perception into a continuous spiral from least expansive to most expansive.²⁸ "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" is an eloquent testimony to the power of a single accurate image to pull together a disparate array of more extended relationships around its hub of energy.

By establishing the innate power of the image to generate form and organization, Stevens is able to break free of the conflict between inside and outside, subjective and objective, that permeates "Domination of Black." This allows his poetry to assert purely concrete relationships between perceptions that can deliver a sense of significance without recourse to abstractions. Stevens can in this way avoid conventional metaphorical constructions. A good example of this can be found in the poem, "Six Significant Landscapes." (See Appendix, p. 189, for a complete text of this poem.) In the first stanza, for instance,

An old man sits
 In the shadow of a pine tree
 In China.
 He sees larkspur,
 Blue and white,
 At the edge of the shadow,
 Move in the wind.
 His beard moves in the wind.
 The pine tree moves in the wind.
 Thus water flows
 Over weeds.

(CP, p. 73)

The visual images accumulate throughout the stanza. First, the poem recounts what the old man sees, then the perception expands to describe the old man's beard moving; then it expands a little further to capture the pine tree moving. The next image, though, "Thus water flows/ Over weeds," seems to break with the former series of perceptions in

the wind. However, it is joined to them with the simple term for summary, "thus." "Water flows over weeds" is therefore not only an addition to the series of perceptions, it concretely summarizes the whole process of perception to that point. The wind moves through and over the flowers, beard, and tree the same way in which water moves over and through weeds. A concrete image, if viewed as a whole embodying a process, need not draw the attention away from the scene at hand. Indeed, it draws the attention within more intensely.

In the next two stanzas of "Six Significant Landscapes," however, Stevens seems deliberately to choose to "humanize" his metaphor. In stanza II he compares the night to a woman concealing herself while performing a provocative dance (CP, p. 74). In stanza III he is explicit: "I measure myself/ Against a tall tree." He finds that through his senses he can extend himself far beyond the tree, yet he is still mortal: "Nevertheless, I dislike/ The way the ants crawl/ In and out of my shadow" (CP, p. 74). By stanza IV, though, his "dream" has broken him out of subjective comparisons and images have their own capacity for form again: "Its (the dream's) hair filled/ With certain blue crystallizations/ From stars/ Not far off" (CP, p. 74). Stanza V again asserts the power of imaged reality: "Not all the knives of the lamp-posts,/ Nor the

chisels of the long streets,/ Nor the mallets of the
domes/ And high towers,/ Can carve/ What one star can
carve,/ Shining through grape leaves" (CP, pp. 74-75).

Finally, in the last stanza, he has what was the
deadly dialectic of inside and outside in "Domination of
Black" quite under creative control and stated in a
compact and concentrated form. There is no need to attempt
to intellectually capture the living and organizing powers
of external reality, for all one captures and confines is
the conceptualizing powers themselves: "Rationalists,
wearing square hats,/ Think, in square rooms,/ Looking at
the floor,/ Looking at the ceiling./ They confine themselves/
To right-angled triangles" (CP, p. 75). This passage seems
reminiscent of the speaker in "Domination of Black" within
his room, having to look out of the window for reality.
But, "If they tried rhomboids,/ Cones, waving lines,
ellipses--/ As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon--/
Rationalists would wear sombreros" (CP, p. 75). If one
plunges into and participates with the forms of change in
reality, he simply adapts and changes according to the
natural process working out its own unity--he is not
destroyed, he merely changes his hat. In the images of
change lie the way out of the hard-angled vision of self
with its incessant and repetitive projections and into
the unpretentious and curvelinear "sombrero" of living
reality.

In conclusion to this sketch of Wallace Stevens' development of a narration centered in images in Harmonium, we might quote R. P. Blackmur, one of Stevens' earliest and most perceptive positive commentators in his essay "Examples of Wallace Stevens,"

. . . I have tried to imply that his success is due largely to his double adherence to words and experience as existing apart from his private sensibility. His great labor has been to allow the reality of what he has felt personally to pass into the superior impersonal reality of words. Such a transformation amounts to an access of knowledge, as it raises to a condition where it may be rehearsed and understood in permanent form, that body of emotional and sensorial experience which in its natural condition makes life a torment and confusion.²⁹

Blackmur's observation is among the first to describe Stevens' attempt to break out of "his private sensibility" and the greatness of the conscientious effort that he expends to do so. Blackmur, though, like too many other literary men, is determined that "emotional and sensorial experience . . . in its natural condition makes life a torment and confusion." Blackmur thus is content with what is, in fact, a novel application of the principle of catharsis to Stevens' work, an application that must have been very flattering to Stevens at the time it was made, for Stevens was never deaf to literary opinion. Flattering though it may be, it still insists upon stuffing Stevens' concentrations of living image into "the superior impersonal

reality of words." For Stevens, words are not reality, the power and potential of living action is. But, until we can develop a critical vocabulary capable of tentatively following his flashes outward into the living change of his "image of the world," flattery is the best we have to offer the retiring yet radiant eye of Hartford.

NOTES

¹Wallace Stevens, "The Effects of Analogy," in The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage Books, 1951), p. 116.

²Yvor Winters, "Wallace Stevens: The Hedonist's Progress," in In Defense of Reason (New York: The Swallow Press and William Morrow and Company, 1947), p. 439.

³Winters, p. 459.

⁴Harold Bloom, The Poems of Our Climate (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 1-26.

⁵Bloom, pp. 394-395.

⁶Bloom, pp. 400-401.

⁷Bloom, p. 404.

⁸Bloom, p. 404.

⁹Bloom, p. 404.

¹⁰Bloom, p. 405.

¹¹Bloom, p. 379.

¹²Joseph N. Riddel, The Clairvoyant Eye (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 41.

¹³Riddel, p. 23.

¹⁴Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," in The Necessary Angel, p. 29.

¹⁵Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," p. 25.

¹⁶Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," pp. 26-27.

¹⁷See Stevens' "The Effects of Analogy," pp. 115-116.

¹⁸Alfred North Whitehead, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), p. 14.

¹⁹Alfred North Whitehead, The Concept of Nature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 29-30.

²⁰Whitehead, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge, p. 76. Also see Concept of Nature, pp. 59, 62.

²¹Stevens, "Imagination as Value," in The Necessary Angel, p. 151.

²²Bloom, p. 405.

²³Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 120-125.

²⁴For a detailed account of possible symbolist influence on Wallace Stevens, see Michael Benamou, "Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination," in The Act of the Mind: Essays on the Poetry of Wallace Stevens, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce and J. Hillis Miller (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), pp. 92-120.

²⁵Stevens, "The Effects of Analogy," p. 116.

²⁶Louis L. Martz, "John Donne: A Valediction," in The Poem of the Mind (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 31.

²⁷Louis L. Martz, "Meditative Action and 'The Metaphysik Style,'" in The Poem of the Mind, p. 46.

²⁸The inspiration for much of the preceding analysis of "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," including the diagram, comes from a study of what Alfred North Whitehead calls his "Chinese Box" theory of perception, an analogy that culminates his explanation of the statement that "the same relation of extension lies at the base both of temporal and spatial extension," in The Concept of Nature, pp. 55-61.

²⁹R. P. Blackmur, "Examples of Wallace Stevens," in The Achievement of Wallace Stevens, ed. Ashley Brown and Robert S. Haller (New York: Gordian Press, 1973), p. 74.

CHAPTER FOUR

POUND'S HUGH SELWYN MAUBERLEY

AND STEVENS' "THE COMEDIAN AS THE LETTER C":

THE CONSEQUENCE OF THE NARRATIVE PERSONA

In the preceding two chapters we have investigated in some detail the poetic efforts of Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens to achieve active perceptual contact with temporal and spatial reality. Much of their success in this enterprise accrues from their determination to make the perceptual images of their poems confirm the value of an intense relationship with concrete reality. In order to generate this intensity, though, both poets appreciate that reality must be a challenge to their perceptive powers, and that they must meet it on its own terms. Therefore they turn their perceptive focus outward toward the mobile energy patterns of actual images rather than inward toward intellectual systems of symbols and categories. This turning outward forsakes subjective assimilation as a means of unity. Instead, Pound and Stevens assert the basic unity revealed by their ability to see whole events. The perception of the whole is the starting point for the act of deriving lesser wholes, the concrete

images, which in its turn liberates the energy of interaction which gives the whole event its power of living mobility and change. This vision of the whole partakes of a living cosmology, a vast fabric interwoven into energy patterns.

With this fabric, change is organic, internal, and always affecting the whole process; it is not imposed externally to alter isolated situations. Thus when Pound and Stevens undertake to write narrative poems like Hugh Selwyn Mauberley and "The Comedian as the Letter C," the quest that the narrative documents is an adventure into contact with reality in process rather than an adventure against reality as a hostile series of causes and effects. The tension of contact with reality, according to Pound and Stevens, is necessary to generate the energy of existence: so why should one attempt to impose a resolution when the tension with reality is what one needs for existence in the first place? In the image and process oriented adventures contained in Hugh Selwyn Mauberley and "The Comedian as the Letter C," the narrative of participation replaces the narrative of survival. The old heroic persona must be sacrificed in order to introduce a new holistic persona capable of drawing power from contact with reality rather than trying

to impose power upon reality. The action of both of the poems takes places within a continuum of perception, enacting this new, broader sense of self that culminates the outward turning activity of Harmonium and Cathay and makes possible the life-long immersion in reality that produced The Cantos and The Complete Poems.

I

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is a long poem constructed from a series of eighteen shorter poems. The subject matter for this series of poems is Ezra Pound's experience in the artistic environment of London from about 1908 to 1920. As a whole, the poem sequence presents two major problems for the reader. First, and most obvious, is the large amount of explicit and implicit allusion that the poem presents. The solution to this first problem is clear enough: one must simply muster the education and energy to trace Pound's sources. This has been done in a very complete and scholarly fashion by J. J. Epsey, whose book, Ezra Pound's Mauberley: A Study in Composition, is now the standard reference text for anyone wishing to understand in a reasonably complete manner the intellectual and stylistic background of the poem. Indeed, it, along

with K. K. Ruthven's A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personae, is the guide used by the present writer for solutions to problems of that kind in the analysis that follows below.

The second problem the poem presents, though, is more difficult and more intriguing, for erudition alone will not solve it. The problem, which has engaged the attention of nearly every serious reader of the poem is this: what is Pound's actual relationship to the events that the poem Hugh Selwyn Mauberley describes? The key term in the preceding question is "describes," for it brings us to the fundamental question of the relationship between description and narrative. Each of the discrete poems in the sequence is a fairly clear description of an identifiable circumstance, given that one can decipher the allusions. However, the connections that exist between these individual poems in the Mauberley sequence are far from clear. In fact, Pound seems to deliberately subvert the traditional means available to the reader for perceiving a coherent sequential relationship between the poems. First of all, the events do not seem to fall into any kind of chronological unity; they seem to be randomly displaced in time. This is not a major problem, though, for freedom to roam the memory is hardly unknown as a narrative device. However, the second means of unity that the poem fails to produce is far more devastating

to the traditional understanding. The poem refuses to produce a consistent protagonist against which to judge the action of the poem. The first twelve poems present a character named "E. P." who describes the follies of his times, observing his culture's weaknesses from a confident and unsullied perspective. In the last five poems of the sequence, though, the protagonist is one "Mauberley," a passive victim of the cultural folly, driven into isolation and sterility. Again this would not be a terribly confusing situation but for the fact that the reader knows that Pound is writing a description of an environment with which he had been intimately involved. Pound even says as much in a note at the bottom of the title page of the poem in the 1926 edition of Personae: "The sequence is so distinctly a farewell to London that the reader who chooses to regard this as an exclusively American edition may as well omit it and turn at once to page 205" (EPP, p. 185). The descriptions are obviously personal, yet how could Pound be both E. P. and Mauberley? The situation is further complicated by the fact that the tone of the poem is for the most part negative, even apocalyptic. As in Moby Dick, an apocalyptic story can only be told by a survivor; but neither E. P. nor Mauberley survive their environment. The narrative

seems to be both "inside" and "outside" of the environment at the same time. This narrative ambivalence has proved a tantalizing conundrum to critics. They have arrived at a variety of conclusions exhibiting a diversity of opinion that can only illustrate what a strain Pound has placed upon their literary assumptions.

In his successful study of Pound, Ezra Pound, Poet as Sculptor, Donald Davie gives an excellent general summation of the two poles of opinion around which critics have turned in attempting to analyze Hugh Selwyn Mauberley:

On the one hand are those who find that H. S. Mauberley is a transparent fiction, who identify the poet at all times with his persona, and so read the two sequences as a clear-sighted and painfully honest judgement by Pound on the limitations of his own talent, and so on the reasons why he could never surpass the limited, though fine, achievement of this very poem other readers have maintained that the poet persona, Mauberley, is at nearly all points distinct from the poet who created him Pound has not unnaturally given his approval to this second reading, but this may be only another rationalization after the fact.¹

The debate that Davie describes hinges upon the "real" identity of the poem's narrator. Is it the voice of the first part of the poem, E. P., who can survey the follies of his civilization with Olympian severity and objectivity? Or is it Mauberley, the weak-kneed dilettante of the second part of the poem, who is so intimidated by cultural

expectations that he retires to a desert isle to die, leaving only one mediocre poem ("Medallion") behind? Or shall we hold with Donald Davie that "the appearance of intricate planning behind the interlinked sequences of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is an illusion, an ex post facto rationalization; . . . the work was in fact written by ear, by improvising and feeling forward from one poem to the next, not according to any pre-ordained scheme."²

All of these arguments, including Davie's to a lesser extent, depend upon the assumption that the poem is ultimately unified around a single personality that is providing a prevailing "attitude" towards the events of the poem. Pound confounds this literary approach through his poem's determined participation with life's processes. Pound does not simply write about the "life of his time"; he writes to bring his time to life. He succeeds in this purpose by documenting his concrete connection to the environment, no matter how inimicable to creative life that environment seems. In Hugh Selwyn Mauberley Pound is so conscientious about making his relationship to his time and place concrete that each of the "attitudes" that comes out of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is a correct expression of the time Ezra Pound spent in London. Nevertheless, the poem is not unified around a

single personality known as "Ezra Pound," but around concrete action of the environment expressed by Pound's relationship to that environment. Pound's personality, thence, ceases to be a single object. Instead, it becomes a set of relationships that confirm the boundaries of objective and subjective experience in London, 1908-1920. Pound's determination to express a concrete relationship to his environment makes it possible, within the context of his poem, for him to be "both" E. P. and Mauberley, since both personalities are types of relations to the larger whole of the London environment, albeit extreme ones. Between these extremes of E. P. and Mauberley lie a broad range of degrees of contact with the world, which the poem presents through a series of historical examples.

In order to understand the method Pound uses to explore these "degrees of contact," we need to return to his emphasis on rhythm. In his article, "Ezra Pound and Music," Murray Schafer gives a good summation of how central a concept this is for Pound's art:

As remarked earlier, such an advanced musical taste is rare among poets, but Pound had a special reason for paying close attention to the best in music. His theory of absolute rhythm governs the proportion of the elements of masterpieces. A second concept, that of Great Bass, links the elements into an individual whole.

Pound does not imply a bass in the present-day musical sense of

the word, but rather a basis that extends like the keel line of a ship, exercising a centripetal pull over everything above it. It too is a temporal not a formal concept, or more correctly, a temporal concept governing the form.³

Schafer's incisive observation here is that the rhythmic is naturally linked to the temporal in Pound's poetry. By maintaining that linkage, time is an expression of living process rather than an arbitrary measuring scale. For Pound's poetry, time is a process, a systematic movement where acts and their durations are functionally related. Rhythms are concrete temporal relationships that arise from contact between elements of a system. Hence, contact is the key to rhythmic relations. When men document how directly they feel (not "feel about") their environment, then their statements participate in the organic pattern of the environment, exhibiting a natural accuracy and sincerity.

Pound is therefore adamant about the value of touch. In the act of contact is the perception of immediacy that allows time to cease being a chronological "mediator" of reality so that it can become part of the functional relationship between perceiver and perceived. Pound generates these intense relationships throughout his poetic career, and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is not an exception. In its narrative action, Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is pervaded by images of contact. These images of contact are the

primary means employed by the poem to express different levels of living participation with reality.

The first, and most intense, image of contact that Hugh Selwyn Mauberley presents is the image of the tomb. In order to see more clearly how this image succeeds in manifesting the value of living time, we can quote an instructive passage from Daniel Pearlman's meticulous book on The Cantos, The Barb of Time:

If we regard the Western conception of history as that of a chronologically ordered causally linked chain of events, we must then define Pound's mind as fundamentally ahistorical. He shares the cyclical time-consciousness of primitive, traditional societies in "their revolt against . . . historical time, their nostalgia for a periodic return to the mythical time of the beginning of things, to the 'Great Time.'"⁴

Pearlman's linkage of Pound with primitive time-consciousness is an excellent aid to our appreciation of how the tomb image works in Hugh Selwyn Mauberley. The reason why we can learn so much about primitive societies from their tombs stem from the fact that they had no conception of death as an ending of life. Death was simply the transition to another life that took place within a more extensive time-frame. This is the reason behind archaeological discoveries of elaborate storage compartments in ancient tombs containing all manner of food and goods for the continuing life of the person buried therein.⁵ Instead

of being a monument to death, the tomb in such a society is an affirmation of the power of life. Such a tomb is a microcosm of the human life lived around it; and it is an image taking shape in the transition from one life to another. These men saw no reason to leave life behind, and neither does Pound.

Given this "primitive" feeling on the part of Pound, his choice of Ronsard's title "De l'Election de son Sepulchre"⁶ as the subtitle for the first part of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley makes a great deal of sense. The tomb image gives Pound a broader time frame so that he can get a concrete perspective upon the narrative events in this section of the poem. As he enters his tomb in the first poem of the sequence, E. P. does not "die" in the modern sense of the term. Instead, he moves into a broader temporal environment which bestows upon him a more extensive, "mythic" persona. The efforts against adversity that he documents for himself now take on a more extensive significance, comparing to the exploits of legendary and literary heroes such as Capaneus, Odysseus, Flaubert, and Villon.⁷ This stepping out of historical time is made explicit in the lines ". . . out of key with his time," and "Unaffected by 'the march of events,'/ He passed from men's memory in l'an trentuniesme/ De son eage" (EPP, p. 189).

Having taken its occupant to a concrete temporal vantage point so that his environment can come into fuller survey, the tomb can now fulfill its second and more important function; it can bring the times to life in microcosm. The tomb, as an embodiment of life in transition by means of contact with the earth, becomes a central image that forces the other events of the poem into a relationship with it. As a central image, it is an event of maximum intensity that naturally evaluates the other environmental events described and narrated in the first section in terms of their degree of contact with the rhythms of living time.

The weakness of this contact in London society becomes clear in the events portrayed in the next few poems. In the first line of the second poem, for instance, there is a switch back to arbitrary linear time: "The age (emphasis added) demanded an image/ Of its accelerated grimace" (EPP, p. 188). The linear time defined by "age" literally demands a distorted image. The mechanism for this distortion is revealed in the last stanza of this second poem: "The 'age demanded' chiefly a mold in plaster,/ Made with no loss of time" (EPP, p. 188). The implication here, of course, is that any contact with strong, challenging materials that must occur through process rather than "exist" arbitrarily is a "loss of

time." The "mold" is an apt image for this activity of squeezing the extension necessary for subtlety into discrete multiples for maximum distribution in the infinitely extendable present of a Newtonian cosmos. In such an artificial environment, there is no natural contact between events, no natural intensity. All relations have to be arbitrarily enforced by unnatural values which "stabilize" and standardize the perceptive process. For Pound, the most deadly of these standardized measures of perceptive value is market value. Market value resides in symbols that need not have anything to do with the experience of perception. In fact, market value institutionalizes loss of contact by moving between the perceiver and his natural sensory perception of reality.⁸ Rhythms are procreative because they unite a perception with a process of growth. Such a perception reveals its origin. The marketable object can be cut off from its source without necessary loss in value, and is therefore non-procreative.

This process of "loss of contact" is concentrated beautifully in the first image of the third poem of the sequence:

The tea-rose tea-gown, etc.
 Supplants the mousseline of Cos,
 The pianola "replaces"
 Sappho's barbitos.

(EPP, p. 189)

A. L. French, in his article, "Olympian Apathein," makes a very instructive misreading of these lines: "Pound evidently thought that a bare mention of Sappho was enough, by implication, to being in the whole Greek ethos."⁹ French feels that Pound tries to disparage the quality of modern culture by an arbitrary comparison with the "classics." Given his disposition against linear historical time, though, Pound simply cannot make such an arbitrary comparison. For Pound, only living time is viable, and an experience of living time is activated only by contact. "Tea-rose tea-gown," "mousseline," "pianola," and "barbitos" are all images of different degrees of contact. The clinging, translucent fabric and the multi-stringed lyre reveal their beauties as a direct result of sensory touch. The fashionable opaque dress and the mechanical piano place the artificial time measures of an afternoon social occasion and the mechanical tempo of a rotating drum between their beauties and human contact. In fact, the tea-gown and the pianola are deliberately designed to deter the senses. Given this loss of primal immediacy, the understanding of experience retreats to a purely verbal abstraction. This is made explicit in the fifth stanza of the third poem:

Faun's flesh is not to us
 Nor the saint's vision.
 We have the press for wafer;
 Franchise for circumcision.
 (EPP, p. 189)

The religious ecstasies are grounded in the physical;
 but once this loss of contact is instituted, their
 power to confirm truth is usurped by the words of the
 officially sanctioned, objective reporter.

Poems IV and V commemorate the life crushed out
 by this "botched civilization" (EPP, p. 190) in World
 War I. The rhythms of all the poems to this point has
 been basically trochaic and remains so throughout Hugh
Selwyn Mauberley; but what is primarily a subversive power
 of rhythm for most of the larger poem comes directly to
 the fore in this fourth poem. According to Epsey, this
 poem's rhythmic structure is taken from the Greek
 pastoral poet Bion.¹⁰ The vocal power of the trochaic
 rhythm in this section is emphasized by a strident anaphora
 that drives the rumble of the back vowels "o" and "u" like
 the pounding of a ritual drum:

Some quick to arm
 some for adventure
 some from fear of weakness
 some from fear of censure,
 some for love of slaughter, in imagination,
 learning later. . .
 some in fear, learning love of slaughter;
 Died some, pro patria,
 non "dulce" non "et decor" . . .
 . . .
 came home, home to a lie,
 home to many deceits,

home to old lies and new infamy;
 usury age-old and age-thick
 and liars in public places.

(EPP, p. 190)

The rhythm of the poem celebrates a human strength in its physical rhythms, even as it mourns its waste and abuse by the lies of those who manipulate by means of smooth verbiage.

The fifth poem, though, offers the final concentration of the general situation described and narrated by poems II-V:

Charm, smiling at the good mouth,
 Quick eyes gone under earth's lid,

For two gross of broken statues,
 For a few thousand battered books.

(EPP, p. 190)

These lines give a highly concentrated contraction of the two extreme degrees of images of contact. In the first two lines, the act of death, the closing of the eyelid, is presented as a whole process. The soldiers in their deaths merge into the earth as naturally as an eyelid closes over a "quick eye." As living creatures expressive of the energies of life, their deaths are part of a larger living pattern. The next two lines, though, conjoin the ostensible reasons for their deaths, the items of culture to be saved, with the arbitrary "distancing" enforced by artificial systems of measurement. When they are numerically quantified, the power of the art works to call up

the power of their creation is nullified and seems small justification for the toll in living flesh.

The last six poems of the "E. P" section of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley are a series of portraits capturing various aspects of the London cultural conditions during Pound's tenure there. Each poem attempts an epiphanous image; and, taken as a group, they seem to be portraits from life of various individuals having various degrees of success in making living contact with the world. The first two poems, "Yeux Glauques" and "Siena Mi Fe; Disfecemi Maremma," portray their protagonists sympathetically. In the first, Pound draws images from a number of pre-Raphaelite paintings and poems to synthesize a general image dear to them, the abused yet innocent woman with eyes "Thin like brook-water,/ With a vacant gaze" (EPP, p. 192). The same theme of abuse and neglect arises in the next narration, that of Monsieur Verog. Actually, according to Epsey, "M. Verog" is Victor Plarr, a member of Yeats' Rhymers' Club during the 1890's,¹¹ now forgotten "among the pickled foetuses and bottled bones" (EPP, p. 193). He is a representative of those with taste; but this taste is too precise and refined for the rigors of modern life. One of the reveries of M. Verog, for instance, is about how "Johnson (Lionel) died/ By falling

from a high stool in a pub." The last of the sympathetic portraits is in poem X, that of "the stylist":

Nature receives him;
 With a placid and uneducated mistress
 He exercises his talents
 And the soil meets his distress.
 (EPP, p. 195)

The "stylist" is aimed in the right direction, toward the living, but he is not in vigorous interaction with life. He is on the outside, away from the "sophistication and contentions" (EPP, p. 195) necessary for full and abundant creative life. All of these sympathetic portraits share one thing in common; they are "too good for the world." They have allowed the forces of arbitrary abstraction to usurp all their aggressive strength, leaving them with passive imaginations drunk on mindless innocence, fond memories, and stubborn solitude. Because of these traits, they are easily swept aside by the "liars in public places." Their imaginations are incomplete. They perceive themselves in contact with the world, but the relation is in only one direction. They are receptive, but they are not active; so the manipulative world pushes them out of genuine, creative contact with reality despite their decent inclinations.

The unsympathetic portraits in this group deserve less attention since they are but individual manifestations of

the negative movement away from contact with living reality described in poems II-V. These four portraits, "Brennbaum," "Mr. Nixon," "Conservatrix of Milesien," and "Lady Valentine," are all of people who consider art to be something cosmetic, a reinforcement to their personal conception of their social selves. The domain of artistic activity for them is as much a means of obscuring the perceptual truth about themselves as it is a source of perceptual power. In fact, too much contact with physical reality is dangerous business as far as they are concerned. Such contact poses a potential threat to their privilege of social and economic exclusivity. It is no wonder, then, that the most concrete images they can generate are images concerned with psychological defense and social hierarchy. Some lines from the portrait of "Lady Valentine" illustrate the tendency:

Poetry, her border of ideas
 The edge, uncertain, but a means of blending
 With other strata
 Where the lower and higher have ending.
 (EPP, p. 196)

The most intriguing of this group of poems in terms of narrative style, though, is "Mr. Nixon." In this poem there is merely the terse introductory description before Mr. Nixon, the literary opportunist, begins to talk on at length, each of his phrases ostentatiously displaying a quotation mark. Mr. Nixon is a man for whom the word is

a commodity to be pushed onto the market as aggressively as floor wax or toothpaste. The quotation marks, then, become images of Mr. Nixon's total commitment to a world of symbols and second-hand measure. Words such as these, garishly engaged in calling attention to themselves, advertise abstraction for its own sake, a "reality" that maintains itself in "the cream gilded cabin of his steam yacht" (EPP, p. 194) at a careful distance from reality's physical touch. Such consistency based upon abstract measurement is forced and static. And it finds its true image in the stolid countenance of a "Brennbaum": "The stiffness from spats to collar/ Never relaxing into grace" (EPP, p. 193).

The poems of the "E. P." section of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley create a very palpable continuum of energy. The continuum is its most concentrated near the source, the initial act of uncompromising contact with reality. At that nexus is the event of contact, the image of the tomb. In order to partake of the power that drives an Odysseus, though, E. P. must work "against the current."¹² His action must be a physical image demonstrating his contact with the earth. He must enter the earth, go into his tomb, and thereby make that tomb--his image of contact--a natural measure of intensity. This establishment of a node of intensity parallels one of Pound's favorite

illustrations for the power of art, the magnet. The magnet is a focus of energy that draws the field surrounding it into a pattern: "the magnet brings order and vitality and thence beauty to a plate of iron filings, . . . a confluence of energy."¹³ The tomb is such a focus in the "E. P." section of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley; it is the primal contact with the earth as source by which all the other images of contact in the poem are measured. By enforcing a pattern upon the other images in this way, the tomb image draws them into the same type of relationship with it that the artifacts deposited in ancient tombs have with the act of burial. They are documents of a less intense common reality surrounding a central image. However, the "artifacts" in Hugh Selwyn Mauberley are not physical like murals, tools, or sculpture. They are made up of words. The tomb of E. P. is a monument to the aspirations and failures of the highly verbal age that he lived in. Yet, like any true monument, it is also the confirmation of an essentially physical experience that lies basic to the abstraction that it houses.

The last section of the poem, entitled "Mauberley," is a foil to the expansiveness of the "E. P." section. This section documents the failed artistic life of one Mauberley, who is something of a composite of the sympathetic portraits in the first section. It is clear, however,

that Mauberley is not the opposite of E. P., but rather E. P. diminished in vision. Mauberley suffers from this deficiency in vision because he allows prevailing tastes and cultural fashions to turn him towards himself and away from concrete reality. Rather than construct a monumental tomb as a central and expansive gesture, Mauberley is content "To present the series/ Of curious heads in medallion" (EPP, p. 200). Because they are not centered around a strong contact with reality, his images are disconnected curiosities rather than a whole pattern. They are the documents of the inevitable isolation and subjectivity of a materialist culture. E. P. is "out of key with his time," wishing his vision to stretch out beyond cultural limits toward direct contact with the living world. As the inverse of the same metaphor, Mauberley, a culturally absorbed eccentricity, is "diabolus in the scale" (EPP, p. 199), unwilling or unable to expand his vision outward.

Since Mauberley's sense of expanse is inward, his isolated images do not have the power to narrate anything other than his personal concerns. For this reason, the five final poems of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley portray a precious and intricately embroidered self-consciousness:

Nothing, in brief, but maudlin confession,
 Irresponse to human aggression,
 Amid the precipitation, down-float
 Of insubstantial manna,
 Lifting the faint susurrus
 Of his subjective hosannah.

(EPP, p. 202)

The image is contracted and centered in a self which is,
 in the final analysis, no better than any other self.
 He is a victim of the material consequences of Humean
 skepticism:

A consciousness disjunct,
 Being but this overblotted
 Series
 Of intermittences.

(EPP, p. 203)

A culture based upon arbitrary measurements develops a
 vested interest in a separation between the perceiver and
 the object of his perception. Such a culture cannot
 abide the celebration of intensity that is centered in
 the possibility of contact. Being "diabolus in the scale"
 of such a culture, Mauberley's art is an art removed from
 the fertile powers of life:

He had passed, inconscient, full gaze,
 The wide-banded irides
 The botticellian sprays implied
 In their diastasis;

Which anaesthesia, noted a year late,
 And weighed, revealed his great affect,
 (Orchid), mandate
 Of Eros, a retrospect.

(EPP, p. 200)

Isolated from a generative source, Mauberley's aesthetic

values center around a brittle solidity. From the fertility and vitality of E. P.'s direct contact with earth and moon, Mauberley's attempts at contact have been refined into dainty and static porcelain. Mauberley's final image, his "Medallion," is the quintessential rendering of such a static porcelain figure:

Honey-red, closing the face-oval,
A basket-work of braids which seem as if they were
Spun in King Minos' hall
From metal, or intractable amber;

The face-oval beneath the glaze,
Bright in its suave bounding-line, as,
Beneath half-watt rays,
The eyes turn topaz.

(EPP, p. 204)

We should stress, however, that even though Mauberley is the servant of a culture that is out of contact with concrete reality, he is still attempting to make some form of contact. Again, Mauberley is not the opposite of E. P.'s honesty. Mauberley's images tell the truth about his overly self-centered environment, even if it is a painful truth of isolation and lost contact. In this sense, Mauberley shares the same sort of truth that the protagonists of the various poems of Cathay share. In Pound's artistically concrete world, contact can never be utterly lost. Sadness is not a vague unhappiness or alienation, but a concrete act of separation. Mauberley is the event of contraction in an ongoing process of

expansion and contraction as surely as E. P. is the event of expansion.

In Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, concern for contact with reality born of the process of rhythm is primary. The rhythm of the poem, then, is not centered in either E. P. or Mauberley at the expense of the other. It is, instead, centered in the "Envoi (1919)" that appears between them. "Envoi" is a love poem even though it never mentions the abstraction "love." Instead, the "song," the celebration of the rhythm that arises out of natural contact, is the concrete unity that the poet hopes will eventually hold his beloved and him together. As Epsey points out, "Envoi" is based upon Edmund Waller's "Go Lovely Rose!"¹⁴ Pound, however, multiplies the number of trochees and spondees enormously, so that the rhythm of "Envoi" builds an intense and complex musical structure from the discrete stresses of the Waller poem. This complex rhythm affirms the reality of time as a rhythmic whole, an affirmation that shines through the last stanza:

Tell her that goes
With song upon her lips
But sings not out the song, nor knows
The maker of it, some other mouth,
May be as fair as hers,
Might in new ages, gain her worshippers,
When our two dusts with Waller's shall be laid,
Siftings on siftings in oblivion,

Till change hath broken down
 All things save Beauty alone.
 (EPP, p. 197)

This song presents a microcosm of the living process of change that is the actual unifying force from which all of the relationships narrated in the larger poem, including the human personality, are derived. Pound concentrates upon aiming his poem directly into this process, drawing out a truer persona for the poem in consequence of the effort. This new persona takes form in a continuum of intensity centered in a life-giving focus upon creative contact with the image as primal perception of change.

II

Wallace Stevens' "The Comedian as the Letter C" presents a narrative challenge to its reader comparable in scope and complexity to Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley. Fortunately, poets are not philosophers; each poet can follow his senses in the way he finds most congenial to his attraction for reality. So, as surely as Pound's vision leads him into the living realities of time, Stevens' vision leads him into the living realities of space. Stevens' diminutive voyager, Crispin, is destined to traverse the limits of the inherently whole "image of the world" that "Sunday Morning" establishes. And, as he explores the six expanses that comprise "The Comedian as

the Letter C," he becomes the agent through whose process of discovery living space can inscribe a concrete pattern on experience.

The concreteness of Crispin's quest, however, causes problems for even the most conscientious readers of this poem, inclined as many are to discover an intellectually consistent program for the poem's narrative unity. A good example of this kind of confusion shows itself in Helen Vendler's critique of "The Comedian" in her book,

On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems:

As Stevens was to say in his last extended poem, he has an instinct for earth as well as an instinct for heaven, but in his earlier years he seems to have been mistaken about what parts of the earth he had an instinct for. He felt obliged to pretend an instinct for the fertility of the earth, when his true instinct was for its austerities and dilapidations. Pursuing the ignus fatuus of luxuriance, he came to grief, not only in the poetry of the daughters but in other parts of "The Comedian" as well, where in convolutions of diction violence is done to language by archaism, slang, and affectation all jumbled together.¹⁵

If we hearken back to the previous chapter, this criticism is reminiscent of both Winters' and Bloom's approaches to Stevens. Like Winters, it emphasizes Stevens' lack of rational consistency; and, like Bloom, it insists that Stevens' "obscurity" is a device for constructing a consistent artistic persona as original attitude that consciously

transcends reality in order to create its individuality. For such a naturally dissociated sensibility as Vendler describes, efforts to make contact with the world can only end in elaborately awkward pretense. However, it is exactly this poetic role mapped by the careful measurement of a precise distance from reality that Crispin's voyage obviates.

As an aid to understanding how "The Comedian as the Letter C" is a continuation and culmination of the process of growth toward reality initiated in poems such as "Sunday Morning" and "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," the comment of Joseph N. Riddel in his book The Clairvoyant Eye is far more instructive:

. . . Stevens' purpose was to create a sensibility, not a protagonist, and to chart the evolution of a seedling self, not a character

Crispin's experience is a reductio of romanticism It is likewise an inward quest to a discovery of the secular self: its needs, its limitations, in a cosmos which no longer feeds the romantic-transcendentalist appetite for self-definition.¹⁶

In terms of the process that has been documenting, Crispin's voyage is indeed a voyage to a new sense of self. But the "inward quest" is not a quest within a static, purely mental space. It is, rather, a quest within a concrete, experiential space that takes form in the actual relation between perceiver and perceived. As

Riddel clearly suggests, the image of the world (the "cosmos") that the perceiver comes into relation with is not a passive object for consumption, but an active challenge to perceptual intensity.

Crispin's voyage is not a quest toward some abstract goal beyond experience; it is a voyage into a more concrete appreciation of experience. As such, the voyage is a voyage through the concrete in which his relationship to his perceptions becomes ever more immediate. This process of increasing immediacy must begin expansively, though. Crispin must see whole first. This act of seeing whole is aided by the fact that the "voice of description" that had to gradually gain control from the subjective dreaming of the woman in "Sunday Morning" is now in control of the narrative from the first. The problem of "Sunday Morning" is thereby inverted. Instead of discovering a voice that can speak of reality as a whole image, in "The Comedian" there is now the problem of deriving a functioning persona that can live immediately within that whole image. On his way toward a conscious self, the primitive Odysseus had to survive the gods that had formerly aided him.¹⁷ On his way to an imaginative self, the civilized Crispin must survive the facility with the powers of verbal abstraction that had formerly aided him.

The preceding problem comes out clearly in the first section of the poem, "The World Without Imagination." The poem opens with a statement about "man": "Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil" (CP, p. 27). This is only the most extended and general tone in which to state this truth. When stated in terms of the human particular, the metaphor is far less flattering. Housed in the puny clown Crispin, the principle of man as "the intelligence of the soil" modulates into a caricature of human presumption: "This same wig of things, this nincompated pedagogue" (CP, p. 27). Both are metaphors for the evolutionary position of Crispin in relation to his world, yet there is a continuum of tone that stretches between the two metaphors. Crispin is at the same time the pinnacle of evolutionary development and a puffed-up egotist. In this mobility of the sensibility from greatness to smallness is a microcosm of the comedic action of the poem. It is a great comedic truth that any single metaphor is necessarily a partial rendering. There is no simple one for one contact between nature and reality. Instead, metaphor is subject to a process of expansion and contraction that participates in the natural forces of expansion and contraction breathing through living reality. Since this living reality allows its particulars to partake in its process--that is, to become images--it is benevolent; and

so the narrative of how these particulars take their place within the whole is quite naturally a comedy. Comedy traverses the distance from general truth to the particular reality. Thus the comedian Crispin's voyage is a voyage across a continuum of perception toward contact with reality. This voyage confirms Crispin's selfhood as a whole range of comedic sensibilities rather than a solid personality in allegorical relation to a single metaphor.

As the actual narrative begins, Crispin immediately learns the lesson of the sea. Its unequivocal expanse will not yield to his assimilation through partial human metaphors the way the flowers and birds of his more familiar landed experience had. The sea is an event with its own energy, a thing quite apart from Crispin. His sense of superiority gained from his ability to draw other living things into the sphere of human measurements and proportions is utterly defeated:

It was not so much the lost terrestrial,
 The snug hibernial from that sea and salt,
 That century of wind in a single puff.
 What counted was mythology of self,
 Blotched out beyond unblotching. Crispin,
 The lutanist of fleas, the knave, thethane,
 The ribboned stick, the bellowing breeches, cloak
 Of China, cap of Spain, imperative haw
 Of hum, inquisitorial botanist,
 And general lexicographer of mute
 And maidenly greenhorns, now beheld himself,
 A skinny sailor peering in the sea-glass.
 What word split up into clickering syllables
 And storming under multitudinous tones

Was name for this short shanks in all that brunt?
Crispin was washed away by magnitude.

(CP, p. 28)

Crispin can no longer identify himself by means of his talent for assimilating and measuring a mute world of lesser things. This "mythology of self" is now transformed by his discovery that he is a part of the sea's energies rather than the sea being part of his. In this unavoidable relationship with the sea, Crispin discovers that the vast, concrete voice of the sea gives him an immediate perspective on his own "pipping sounds" (CP, p. 29). Crispin realizes that he must learn to work with his new perception of the whole expanse, this "world without imagination" that the "vast, subjugating tone" of the sea presents:

The sea
Severs not only lands, but also selves.
Here was no help before reality.
Crispin beheld and Crispin was made new.
The imagination, here, could not evade,
In poems of plums, the strict austerity
Of one vast, subjugating final tone.
The drenching of stale lives no more fell down.
What was this gaudy, gusty panoply?
Out of what swift destruction did it spring?
It was caparison of wind and cloud
And something given to make whole among
The ruses that are shattered by the large.

(CP, p. 30)

Crispin gets a giant perspective on his own concrete minuteness in an ultimately concrete reality. We should note, though, that this perspective provided by the sea is only beyond the discriminating power of Crispin's

words; it is not beyond his senses. Crispin's contact with a great expanse is an experience of a concrete unifying boundary not unlike the horizon image at the end of "Sunday Morning." "Sunday Morning" affirms this boundary's existence, "The Comedian as the Letter C" narrates its continuous effect over the lesser images of reality.

The eye of Crispin now lands in Yucatan with a transformed respect for the inherent power of his environment. "He was a man made vivid by the sea," now able to put himself into a more balanced creative relationship with the enormous distribution of color and movement surrounding him. Back on land Crispin has enough familiar gravity available to him to admit his perception of a multitude of possibilities--a multitude of relationships into which he can imagine himself:

Crispin foresaw a curious promenade
Or, nobler, sensed an elemental fate,
And elemental potencies and pangs,
And beautiful barenesses yet unseen,
Making the most of the savagery of palms,
Of moonlight on the thick, cadaverous bloom
That yuccas breed, and of the panther's tread.
The fabulous and its intrinsic verse
Came like two spirits parleying, adorned
In radiance from the Atlantic coign,
For Crispin and his quill to catechize.

(CP, p. 31)

Crispin's poetic action now feeds on the native activity of the external rather than the civilized proportion of

the internal and subjective. The energy of the whole shown to Crispin by the sea now becomes available to him in more limited images that he is able to translate.

Crispin is now able to see whole and to accept the independent energy of the images he comes into contact with. Yucatan is vast and savage, yet in its variety Crispin can find the energies of the particular in the alien independence of each of his encounters with this abundant world. He is no longer trying to measure his perceptions according to human values and their conventions. He need no longer try to fit his perceptions into a scale of civilized proportion. Instead he records the images with the energy that they bring to him, so that they are able to speak through him. Like an atom under a barely controlled breakdown process, the always tentative unity of this environment releases enormous amounts of energy that Crispin allows to flow through him. The former "lutanist of fleas" whose simple self was severed by the sea now forges a new one with the help of the wild environment:

He perceived
That coolness for his heat came suddenly,
And only, in the fables that he scrawled
With his own quill, in its indigenous dew,
Of an aesthetic tough, diverse, untamed,
Incredible to prudes, the mint of dirt,
Green barbarism turning paradigm
(CP, p. 31)

But the voice of reality, if somewhat diminished from the totally overwhelming expanse of the sea, is still unified and powerful in the image of a thunderstorm that frightens Crispin into a church and informs him of the true extent of physical power in nature and the impossibility of his expressing the energy of the whole through his puny form, no matter how receptive he might make himself. Crispin, though, finds refreshment in his realization that although he cannot be a "paradigm" of this powerful force of nature, he can still be an echo of its strength in the particular. Again, Crispin is abashed by his experience of limitation; yet this time he is left with a new voice:

And while the torrent on the roof still droned
 He felt the Andean breath. His mind was free
 And more than free, elate, intent, profound
 And studious of a self possessing him,
 That was not in him in the crusty town
 From which he sailed. Beyond him, westward, lay
 The mountainous ridges, purple ballustrades,
 In which the thunder, lapsing in his clap,
 Let down gigantic quavers of its voice,
 For Crispin to vociferate again.

(CP, p. 33)

Even though he is humbled again, this experience confirms that Crispin's source of value of now his contact with reality. Inside the church, Crispin gains faith in an experienced vastness of which he can now echo. He has now regained the power to actively engage reality with a truer respect for both his own powers of proportion and the unassimilated energies of reality.

Having been centered in this balance, Crispin moves into the center of the poem to make his clearest expression of his continuous relationship to reality in "Approaching Carolina." Upon regaining his active descriptive powers, he first indulges them luxuriantly, painting himself an ideal image of the "Carolina" that he seeks:

America was always north to him,
 A northern west, or western north, but north,
 And thereby polar, polar-purple, chilled
 And lank, rising and slumping from a sea
 Of hardy foam, receding flatly, spread
 In endless ledges, glittering submerged
 And cold in a boreal mistiness of the moon.
 (CP, p. 34)

However, his now ingrained physical perspective catches him short, forces him to realize that these mental images are partial renderings of his total perceptive process:

Perhaps the Arctic moonlight really gave
 The liaison, the blissful liaison,
 Between himself and his environment,
 Which was, and if, chief motive, first delight,
 For him, and not for him alone. It seemed
 Illusive, faint, more mist than moon, perverse,
 Wrong as a divagation to Peking,
 To him that postulated as his theme
 The vulgar, as his theme and hymn and flight,
 A passionately niggling nightingale.
 (CP, p. 35)

He concretely realizes that his mental images do not have the strength of direct perception. They are of the character of reflected light, dim and intangible as the moonlight: "Moonlight was an evasion, or, if not,/ A

minor meeting, facile, delicate" (CP, p. 35). In his transition between Yucatan and Carolina he realizes that his perceptual reality is transitional and in process of change as well. In eight clear lines he taps the movement of this process of change of which he is a part:

Thus he conceived his voyaging to be
 An up and down between two elements,
 A fluctuating between sun and moon,
 A sally into gold and crimson forms,
 As on this voyage, out of goblinry,
 And then retirement like a turning back
 And sinking down into the indulgences
 That in the moonlight have their habitude.
 (CP, p. 35)

Here the descriptive voice of the poem can merge with Crispin's narration of his circumstances in a harmonious and active relationship between the imaginative powers of a perceiving mind and the energies of a perceptually independent reality:

And thus he tossed
 Between a Carolina of old time,
 A little juvenile, an ancient whim,
 And the visible, circumspect presentment drawn
 From what he saw across his vessel's prow.
 (CP, p. 35)

The power of the mind to see consistent wholes is actively balanced by the "circumspect presentment" of sensed reality. Crispin "tosses" between the two, though, so the balance achieved here is not an arbitrary intellectual compromise, but a dynamic balance emerging from the creative interaction that occurs when the natural expansiveness of the mind imagining meets the limits of reality.

This happy balance does not last long, however. Having landed on the American shore, the temperate strength of its reality presses Crispin back into his verbal intellect. Crispin's first egotistic inscription, "Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil," is replaced by its simple opposite, "Note: his soil is man's intelligence" (CP, p. 36). Crispin's attempts to assimilate reality into his metaphors were crushed by the expanse of the sea. Now, instead of asking reality to serve him unquestioningly, Crispin will serve reality, "the essential prose" (CP, p. 36), unquestioningly. Crispin's imaginative powers, his "mental moonlight," return from their outward sweep of perception to their original subjective task of ordering, only now as servant of reality instead of master. He is determined to make a "new intelligence prevail" (CP, p. 37). His symbol for this new order is "The Idea of a Colony." Gradually contracting the expansive act that was his perceiving mind, he envisions a secondary, more properly intellectual expansion, a colony at the service of the order that he envisions for physical nature. Thus, "The man in Georgia waking among pines/ Should be pine-spokesman . . ." and "Sepulchral senors, bibbling pale mescal,/ Oblivious to the Aztec almanacs,/ Should make the intricate Sierra scan" (CP, p. 38). Crispin now scorns the visionary powers entirely:

He could not be content with counterfeit,
 With masquerade of thought, with hapless words
 That must belie the racking masquerade,
 With fictive flourishes that preordained
 His passion's permit, hang of coat, degree
 Of buttons, measure of his salt. Such trash
 Might help the blind, not him, serenely sly.
 It irked beyond his patience. Hence it was,
 Preferring text to gloss, he humbly served
 Grotesque apprenticeship to chance events.
 (CP, p. 39)

With each succeeding section of the poem, Crispin's reality becomes more concentrated. This is the natural process for the reality of any perception to follow as it begins in the blur of expanse and ends in the concentration of solidity. When Crispin gives up his efforts to let his imaginative powers work with or against his reality, the concentrating strength of reality works ever more exorably upon him, turning his "Idea of a Colony" into "A Nice Shady Home." Crispin's vision of order contracts to tepid rationale; his high rhetoric is now ironic hyperbole:

Was he to bray this in profoundest brass
 Aointing his dreams with fugal requiems?
 Was he to company vastest things defunct
 With a blubber of tom-toms harrowing the sky?
 Scrawl a tragedian's testament? Prolong
 His active force in an inactive dirge,
 Which, let the tall musicians call and call,
 Should merely call him dead? Pronounce amen
 Through choirs infolded to the outmost clouds?
 Because he built a cabin who once planned
 Loquacious columns by the ructive sea?
 (CP, p. 41)

Crispin has no more images of his own. His contact with reality has now become so sensually immediate that it absorbs him into its quotidian truth.

From Crispin's final physical immediacy with the earth come Crispin's final, most physical images, his four daughters. The poem's image of space, having begun so vast, has now shrunk to Crispin's own single cabin. The continuum from general to particular has been crossed. Crispin produces one daughter for each element and season, his "four blithe instruments/ Of differing struts" (CP, p. 45). Interestingly enough, and quite fortunately for the unity of the poem, even as Crispin achieves this purely sensual immediacy with his environment, he is still within the continuum established by the image of the vast sea at the beginning of the poem. He is safely at port, but he must carry the experience of the sea into his domestic normalcy. At the beginning, his physical self was a "a short-shanks in all that brunt," a concrete whisper in the sea's gale. In "A Nice Shady Home" and "And Daughters with Curls," the originally physical expanse of the sea is diminished until all that is left of it are the specimens of expansive and ornate diction which make up so much of these final two sections. It is as though the difficulty of the language maintains the

ultimate difficulty of reality even in the most familiar of domestic circumstances. Crispin seems to have come full circle; but the power of his transformation is shimmering in the language that describes him, a language that is now concretely recalling his initial contact with reality. Crispin has not come full circle, he has traced a continuous spiral between his most expansive and most contracted interaction with his physical environment. Crispin traces an inevitable contact between the whole and its particular through the medium of language forged into ever more intense spatial images. The poem is a process that begins in a transforming expanse and then cuts a path toward an experience of the particular that never loses contact with that initial expanse. As stated before, this is a concrete expression of the comedic process in action.

As we discovered in an earlier chapter in the analysis of "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," the particular event is what centers the expanse of things and draws it into a spiral process connecting the two extremes of perception. In terms of the title of the poem, Crispin as the discoverer of the particular is the concrete sound of "C" within the whole term "Comedian." The process of the comedy's reality is the continuum between the concrete velar step and the general notion. In this context,

Stevens' well-known cryptic comment about the poem in a letter to Hi Simons seems less evasive:

The final thing on which I want to comment is not the easiest thing in the world to put into words. It is true that the letter C is a cypher for Crispin, but using the cypher was meant to suggest something that nobody seems to have grasped. I can state it, perhaps, by changing the title to this: THE COMEDIAN AS THE SOUNDS OF THE LETTER C Now as Crispin moves through the poem, the sounds of the letter C accompany him as crickets, etc. must have accompanied St. Francis.¹⁸

Wallace Stevens, the conscientiously concrete creator, pursues the process of the whole being focused by the changes of its parts to microscopic dimensions. Some further comments that Stevens makes in a postscript to this same letter are of further interest in this vein:

People say that I live in a world of my own: that sort of thing. Instead of seeking therefore for a "relentless contact," I have been interested in what might be described as an attempt to achieve the normal, the central. . . . Of course I don't agree with the people that say that I live in a world of my own: I think that I am perfectly normal, but I see that there is a center.¹⁹

For Stevens as for Crispin neither extreme in the expanding and contracting process of life in which the poem moves can triumph. Instead, it is the process that triumphs, the narrative action born out of the tension at the center. The "man" of this poem is the man who turns outward to go into relation with his image

of the world and derives himself as a particular, "clipped" out of reality.

III

In "The Comedian as the Letter C" and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley both, the achievement of the narratives is not where they end, but in the process by which they get to their endings. Both poems are true to the image as event in that in the ending, although the perceptive powers are contracted, this contraction is a natural response to the environment and contact is maintained with the poem's expansive, visionary aspect. This continuity of perception is possible because neither poem treats its environment as a bare given: the environment in both is an active, living force that admits of different degrees of contact. This possibility of different degrees of contact means that the sequence of events that make up the action of the poem is not ordered by an arbitrary principle such as chronological time or the space of a mercator map. Instead, the events are ordered by the intensity of living experience that manifests itself in the interaction of the particular with the whole, each poem being a spectrum of these interactions.

The pursuit of contact with the environment exhibited by Pound and Stevens in these two poems is concrete evidence of what naturally occurs as men in the West enter their Twentieth century and face with honesty the true powers of nature. The vast variety of nature, we discover, is not lifeless and pliable, but living and aggressive, forcing its human perceivers into a more equitable relationship with it. This power of nature is forcing upon us a vision of life uncontrolled by the subjective human conveniences of three-dimensional space and time. A non-living nature must depend upon either human reason or human perception to give it an orderly and proportional form. Both Pound and Stevens recognize the existence of this atavistic desire. But when they reveal it in Hugh Selwyn Mauberley and "The Comedian as the Letter C," the images in which it reveals itself are diminutive and distorted. Pound portrays this atavistic effort through images of an economic system that squanders life and snuffs out creativity by attaching arbitrary values to perception that deny artistic acts their necessary intensity with the fundamental reality of the earth. Stevens portrays this human desire to order things by first proposing a facile evolutionary theory of man as the soil's "intelligence" and then juxtaposing the image of the diminutive Crispin humiliated by his honest confrontation with the elemental

power of the sea.

Both poems, though, offer a positive alternative to their negative assertions that the power of physical reality must necessarily deflate human presumption. This alternative consists of a discovery of the value of concrete perception and the assertion of a continuum of image stretching between man and nature in which the two can interact as elements of the whole of life. Poetry that lives through this process must necessarily turn outward to discover and confirm the whole fabric of relations that makes the act of perception possible. Thus, in the world of Pound and Stevens, the world of relativity and quantum mechanics, perception cannot be a given. It is, rather, an uncompromisingly sensory act in which perceiver and perceived are interactive parts of an actual whole. Within this process, time and space take living shape as a result of perception, and what were static attitudes towards objects of perception lose their primacy to the new value of immediacy, an immediacy that is the ardent concern of both Pound's Cathay and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley and Stevens' Harmonium. This process amounts to, in literary terms, a conflation of narrative and description that puts the human protagonist in an inevitable relationship with his environment. This relationship naturally precludes the meaningful existence of

a heroic individual who can triumph over his environment. This kind of a priori personality cannot draw on enough of the intensity of life to survive his inevitable sense of isolation. However, insofar as the perceiving human becomes an event within the whole of living events, he can derive his unity through his concrete efforts to come into conscious relationship to that whole. In this world of relationships unity is not an artificial contrivance. It is, instead, a process of discovering the concrete and connected field of relationships out of which both creative activity and creative persona derive their existence. That vast field of inevitably connected living energy is what both Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens open outward toward and lead the way into. Let the exploration begin.

NOTES

¹Donald Davie, Ezra Pound, Poet as Sculptor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 99.

²Davie, Ezra Pound, Poet as Sculptor, pp. 98-99.

³Murray Schafer, "Ezra Pound and Music," in Ezra Pound, a Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Walter Sutton (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 139.

⁴Daniel Pearlman, The Barb of Time (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 25. Pearlman cites the inner quote as Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History, p. ix.

⁵See Julian Jaynes, The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977), pp. 149-165.

⁶John J. Epsey, Ezra Pound's Mauberley, a Study in Composition (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1955), p. 85.

⁷Epsey, pp. 85-86.

⁸The World War II broadcasts from Rome that ruined Pound's public reputation were a result of his frustration over America's and Europe's resistance to what he felt was the need for fundamental economic reform. The economic uncertainty of the past several years indicates that Pound's indictment of the system has yet to be proven conclusively wrong. See "Canto XLV" for Pound's most artistically successful poem against usury.

⁹A. L. French, "'Olympian Apathein,' Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley and Modern Poetry," Essays in Criticism 15(1965), 434.

¹⁰Epsey, pp. 43-44.

¹¹Epsey, pp. 91-96.

¹²Ezra Pound, Guide to Kultur (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 159-160.

¹³Ezra Pound, "Affirmation II," The New Age, January 14, 1915, 277.

¹⁴Edmund Waller, "Go, Lovely Rose!" in The Discovery of Poetry, ed. Thomas E. Sanders (New York: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1967), p. 174.

Go, Lovely Rose!

Go, lovely rose!
Tell her, that wastes her time and mine
That now she knows,
When I resemble her to thee,
How sweet and fair she seems to be.

Tell her that's young
And shuns to have her graces spied,
That hadst thou sprung
In deserts, where no men abide,
Thus must have uncommended died.

Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired;
Bid her come forth,
Suffer herself to be desired,
And not blush so to be admired.

Then die! that she
The common fate of all things rare
May read in thee:
How small a part of time they share
That are so wondrous sweet and fair!

¹⁵Helen Vendler, On Extended Wings, Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 45.

¹⁶Joseph N. Riddel, The Clairvoyant Eye (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), pp. 95-96.

¹⁷Jaynes, pp. 272-277.

¹⁸Wallace Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 351.

¹⁹Stevens, Letters, p. 352.

APPENDIX

Sestina: Altaforte

LOQUITUR: En Bertrans de Born.

Dante Alighieri put this man in hell for that he
was a stirrer up of strife.

Eccovi!

Judge ye!

Have I dug him up again?

The scene is at his castle, Altaforte. "Papiols"
is his jongleur. "The Leopard," the device of
Richard Coeur de Lion.

I

DAMN it all! all this our South stinks peace.

You whoreson dog, Papiols, come! Let's to
music!

I have no life save when the swords clash.

But ah! when I see the standards gold, vair, purple,
opposing

And the broad fields beneath them turn crimson,

Then howl I my heart nigh mad with rejoicing.

II

In hot summer have I great rejoicing

When the tempests kill the earth's foul peace,

And the lightnings from black heav'n flash crimson,

And the fierce thunders roar me their music

And the winds shriek through the clouds mad,
opposing,

And through all the riven skies God's swords clash.

III

Hell grant soon we hear again the swords clash!

And the shrill neighs of destriers in battle rejoicing,

Spiked breast to spiked breast opposing!

Better one hour's stour than a year's peace
 With fat boards, bawds, wine and frail music!
 Bah! there's no wine like the blood's crimson!

IV

And I love to see the sun rise blood-crimson.
 And I watch his spears through the dark clash
 And it fills all my heart with rejoicing
 And pries wide my mouth with fast music
 When I see him so scorn and defy peace,
 His lone might 'gainst all darkness opposing.

V

The man who fears war and squats opposing
 My words for stour, hath no blood of crimson
 But is fit only to rot in womanish peace
 Far from where worth's won and the swords clash
 For the death of such sluts I go rejoicing;
 Yea, I fill all the air with my music.

VI

Papiols, Papiols, to the music!
 There's no sound like to swords swords opposing,
 No cry like the battle's rejoicing
 When our elbows and swords drip the crimson
 And our charges 'gainst "The Leopard's" rush
 clash.
 May God damn for ever all who cry "Peace!"

VII

And let the music of the swords make them crimson!
 Hell grant soon we hear again the swords clash!
 Hell blot black for alway the thought "Peace!"
 (EPP, pp. 28-29)

Lament of the Frontier Guard

By the North Gate, the wind blows full of sand,
 Lonely from the beginning of time until now!
 Trees fall, the grass goes yellow with autumn.
 I climb the towers and towers
 to watch out the barbarous land:
 Desolate castle, the sky, the wide desert.
 There is no wall left to this village.
 Bones white with a thousand frosts,
 High heaps, covered with trees and grass;
 Who brought this to pass?
 Who has brought the flaming imperial anger?
 Who has brought the army with drums and with
 kettle-drums?
 Barbarous kings.
 A gracious spring, turned to blood-ravenous autumn,
 A turmoil of wars-men, spread over the middle king-
 dom,
 Three hundred and sixty thousand,
 And sorrow, sorrow like rain.
 Sorrow to go, and sorrow, sorrow returning.
 Desolate, desolate fields,
 And no children of warfare upon them,
 No longer the men for offence and defence.
 Ah, how shall you know the dreary sorrow at the
 North Gate,
 With Rihoku's name forgotten,
 And we guardsmen fed to the tigers.

By Rihaku
 (EPP, p. 133)

Domination of Black

At night, by the fire,
 The colors of the bushes
 And of the fallen leaves,
 Repeating themselves,
 Turned in the room,
 Like the leaves themselves
 Turning in the wind.
 Yes: but the color of the heavy hemlocks
 Came striding.
 And I remembered the cry of the peacocks.

The colors of their tails
 Were like the leaves themselves
 Turning in the wind,
 In the twilight wind.
 They swept over the room,
 Just as they flew from the boughs of the
 hemlocks
 Down to the ground.
 I heard them cry--the peacocks.
 Was it a cry against the twilight
 Or against the leaves themselves
 Turning in the wind,
 Turning as the flames
 Turned in the fire,
 Turning as the tails of the peacocks
 Turned in the loud fire,
 Loud as the hemlocks
 Full of the cry of the peacocks?
 Or was it a cry against the hemlocks?

Out of the window,
 I saw how the planets gathered
 Like the leaves themselves
 Turning in the wind.
 I saw how the night came,
 Came striding like the color of the heavy
 hemlocks
 I felt afraid.
 And I remembered the cry of the peacocks.³
 (CP, pp. 8-9)

Six Significant Landscapes

I

An old man sits
 In the shadow of a pine tree
 In China.
 He sees larkspur,
 Blue and white,
 At the edge of the shadow,
 Move in the wind.
 His beard moves in the wind
 The pine tree moves in the wind.
 Thus water flows
 Over weeds.

II

The night is of the color
 Of a woman's arm:
 Night, the female,
 Obscure,
 Fragrant and supple,
 Conceals herself.
 A pool shines,
 Like a bracelet
 Shaken in a dance.

III

I measure myself
 Against a tall tree.
 I find that I am much taller,
 For I reach right up to the sun,
 With my eye;
 And I reach to the shore of the sea
 With my ear.
 Nevertheless, I dislike
 The way the ants crawl
 In and out of my shadow.

IV

When my dream was near the moon,
 The white folds of its gown
 Filled with yellow light.
 The soles of its feet
 Grew red.
 Its hair filled
 With certain blue crystallizations
 From stars,
 Not far off.

V

Not all the knives of the lamp-posts,
 Nor the chisels of the long streets,
 Nor the mallets of the domes
 And high towers,
 Can carve
 What one star can carve,
 Shining through the grape-leaves.

VI

Rationalists, wearing square hats,
 Think, in square rooms,
 Looking at the floor,
 Looking at the ceiling.
 They confine themselves
 To right-angled triangles.
 If they tried rhomboids,
 Cones, waving lines, ellipses--
 As, for example, the ellipse of the half-
 moon--
 Rationalists would wear sombreros.
 (CP, pp. 73-75)

Thirteen Ways of Looking
at a Blackbird

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI

Icicles filled the long window
 With barbaric glass.
 The shadow of the blackbird
 Crossed it, to and fro.
 The mood
 Traced in the shadow
 An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,
 Why do you imagine golden birds?
 Do you not see how the blackbird
 Walks around the feet
 Of the women about you?

VIII

I know noble accents
 And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
 But I know, too,
 That the blackbird is involved
 In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
 It marked the edge
 Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds
 Flying in a green light,
 Even the bawds of euphony
 Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut
 In a glass coach.
 Once, a fear pieced him,
 In that he mistook
 The shadow of his equipage
 For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.
 The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
 It was snowing
 And it was going to snow.
 The blackbird sat
 In the cedar limbs.

(CP, pp. 92-95)

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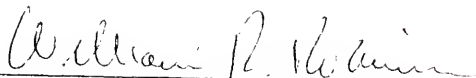
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Bruce Gladden Nims was born December 9, 1949, in Rock Hill, South Carolina. He grew up at his family home in Fort Mill, South Carolina, and attended the Fort Mill Public Schools, graduating in 1968. He then attended Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina, on an academic scholarship. While at Wofford, he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Hyperopics, and was co-winner of the Outstanding Major Award given by the Department of English. He graduated summa cum laude in May, 1972.

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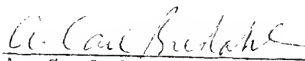
He has been a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Department of English since September, 1973, and is married to the former Patricia Richards of Orlando, Florida. They have one son, Joshua Henry, who lights their lives.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



William R. Robinson, Chairman
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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



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